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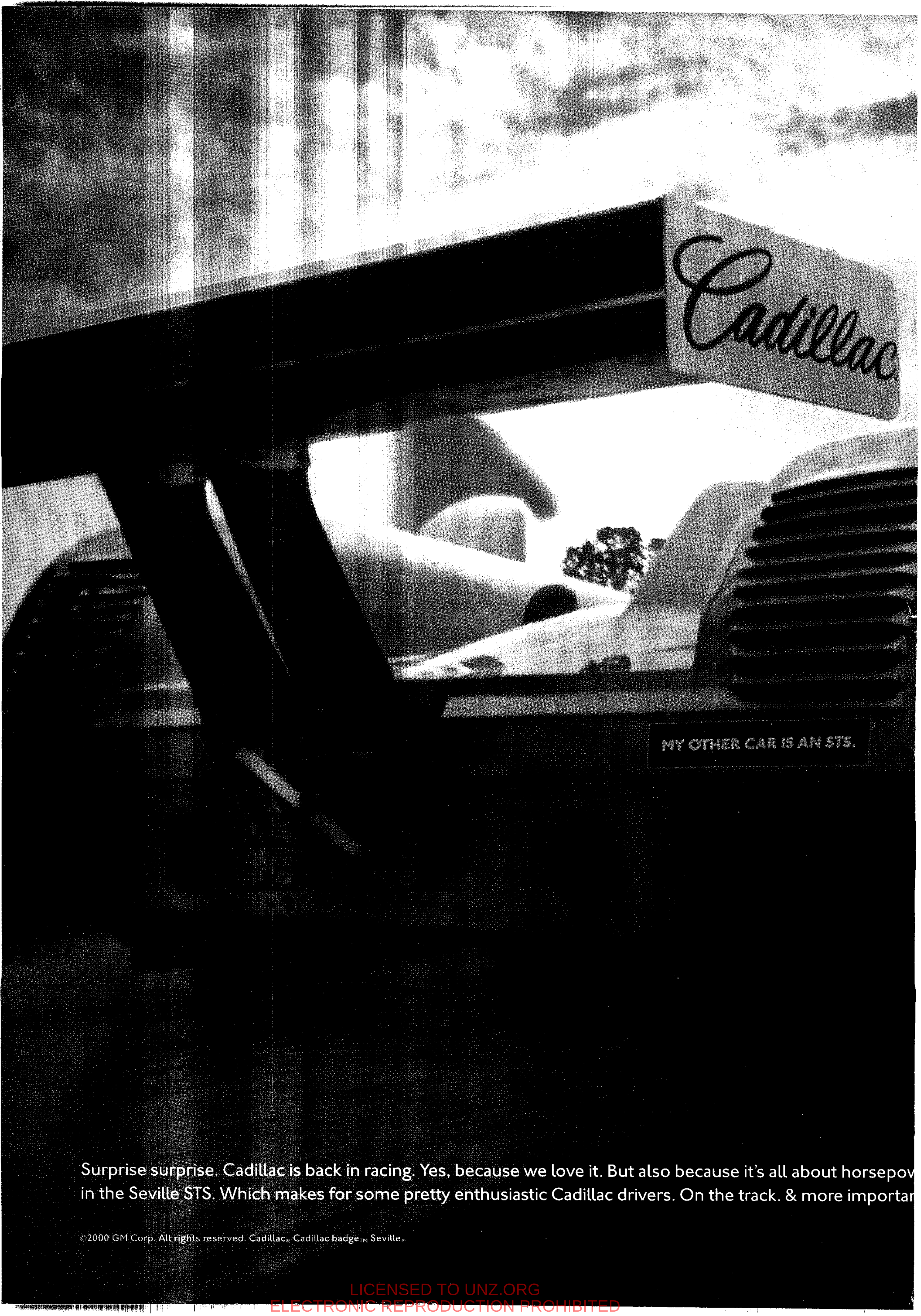

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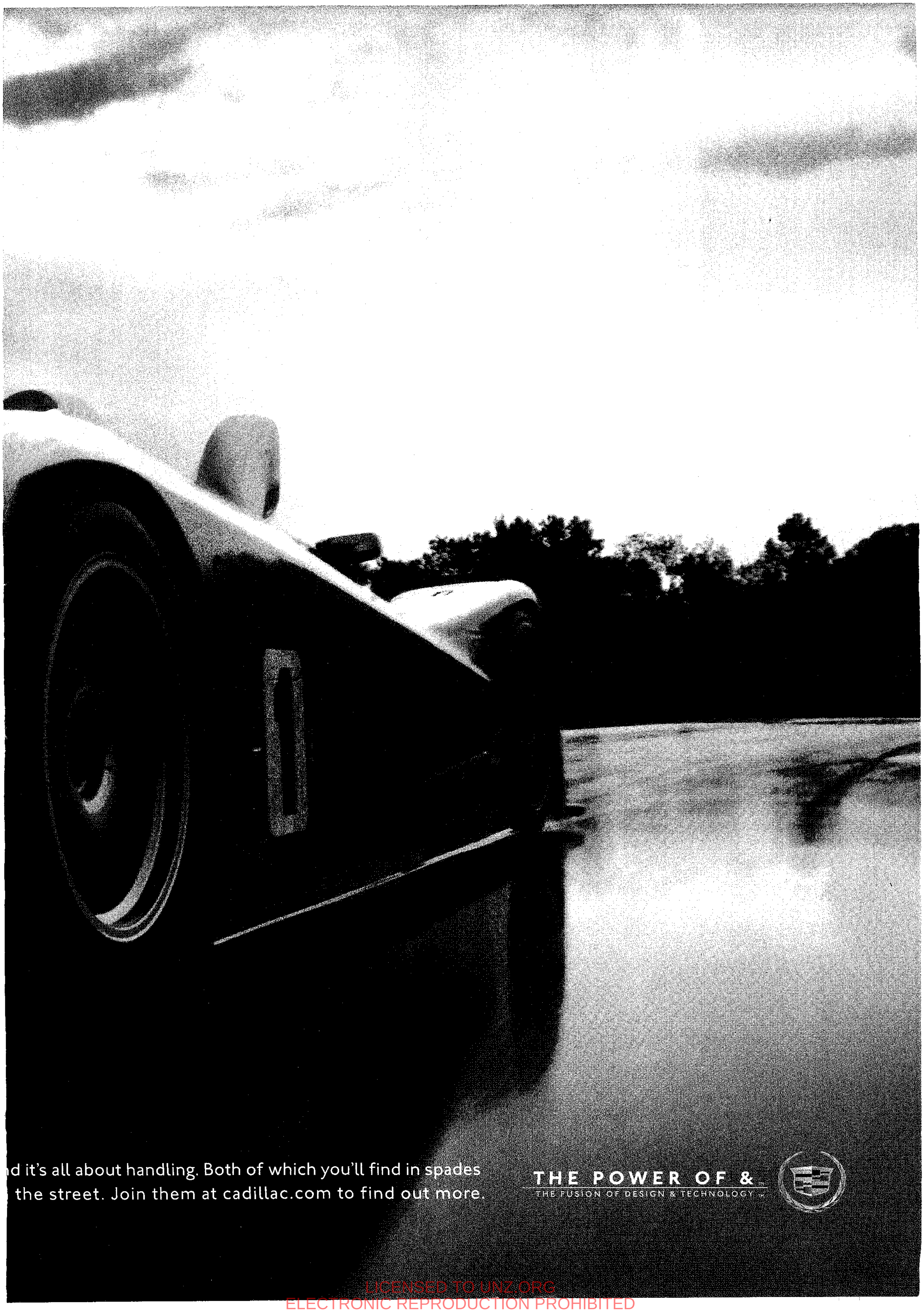
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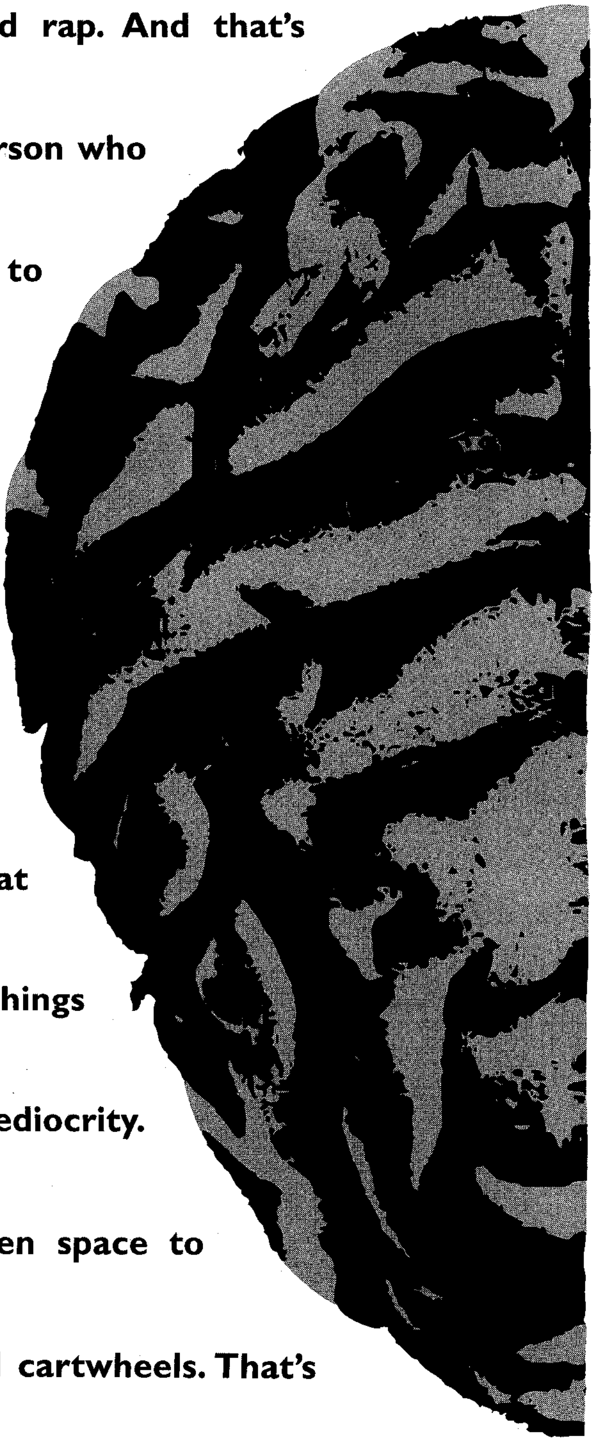

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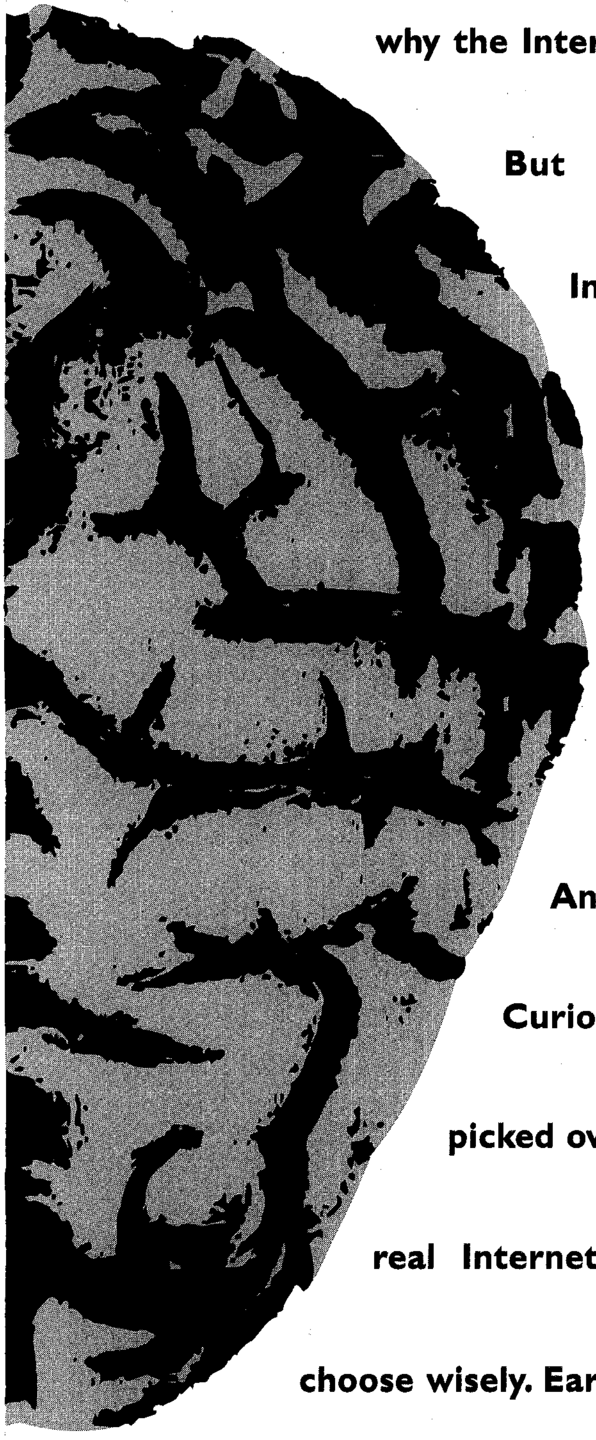

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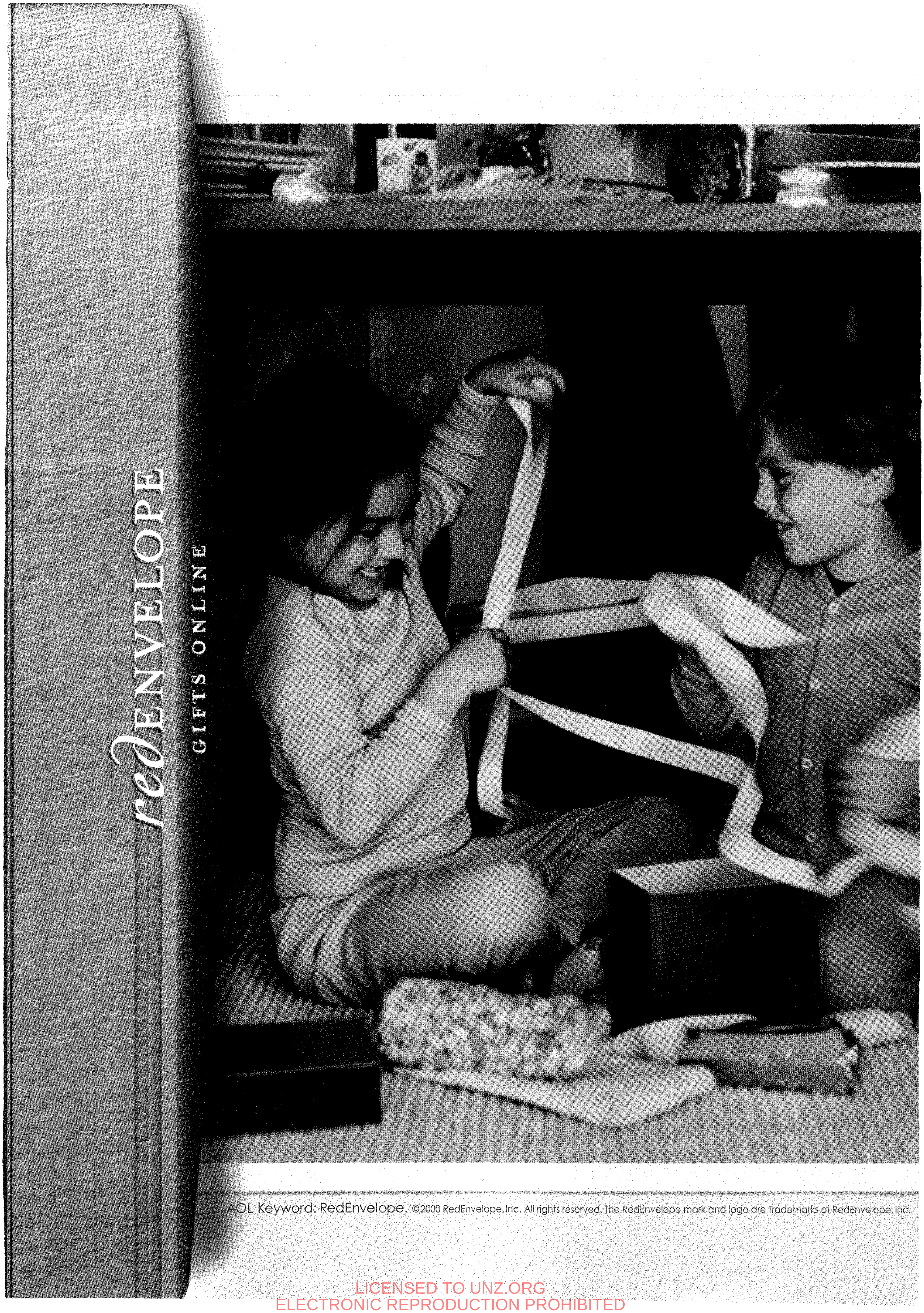
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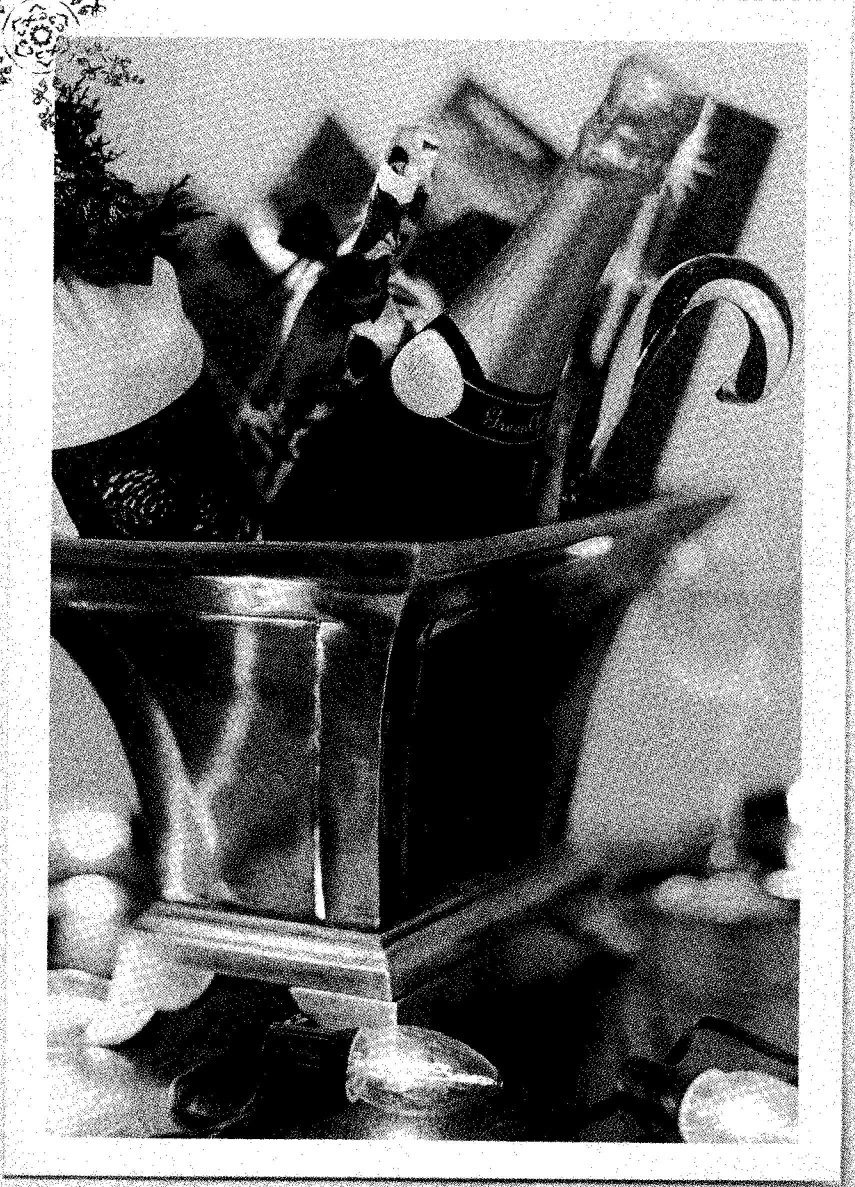

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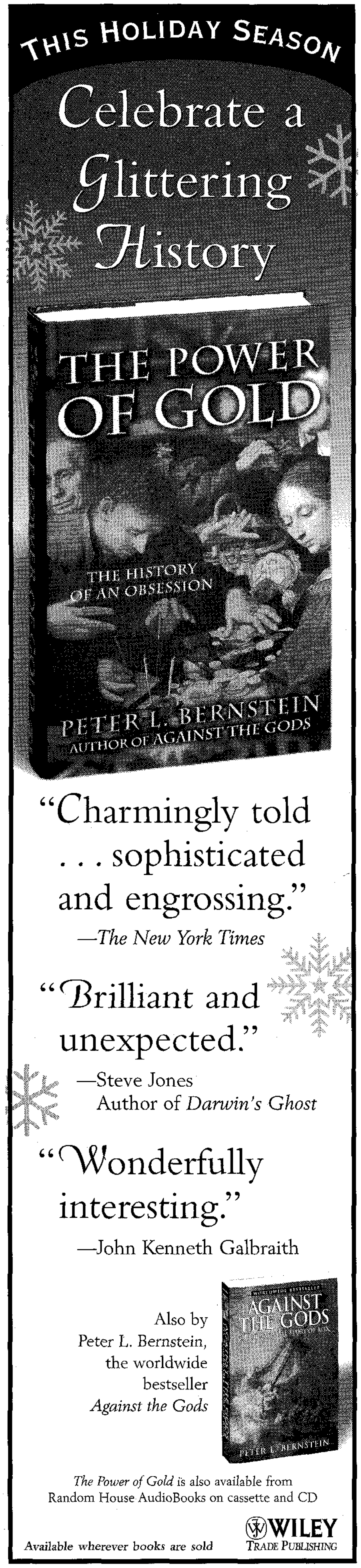

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THE NEW YORKER

DECEMBER 11, 2000

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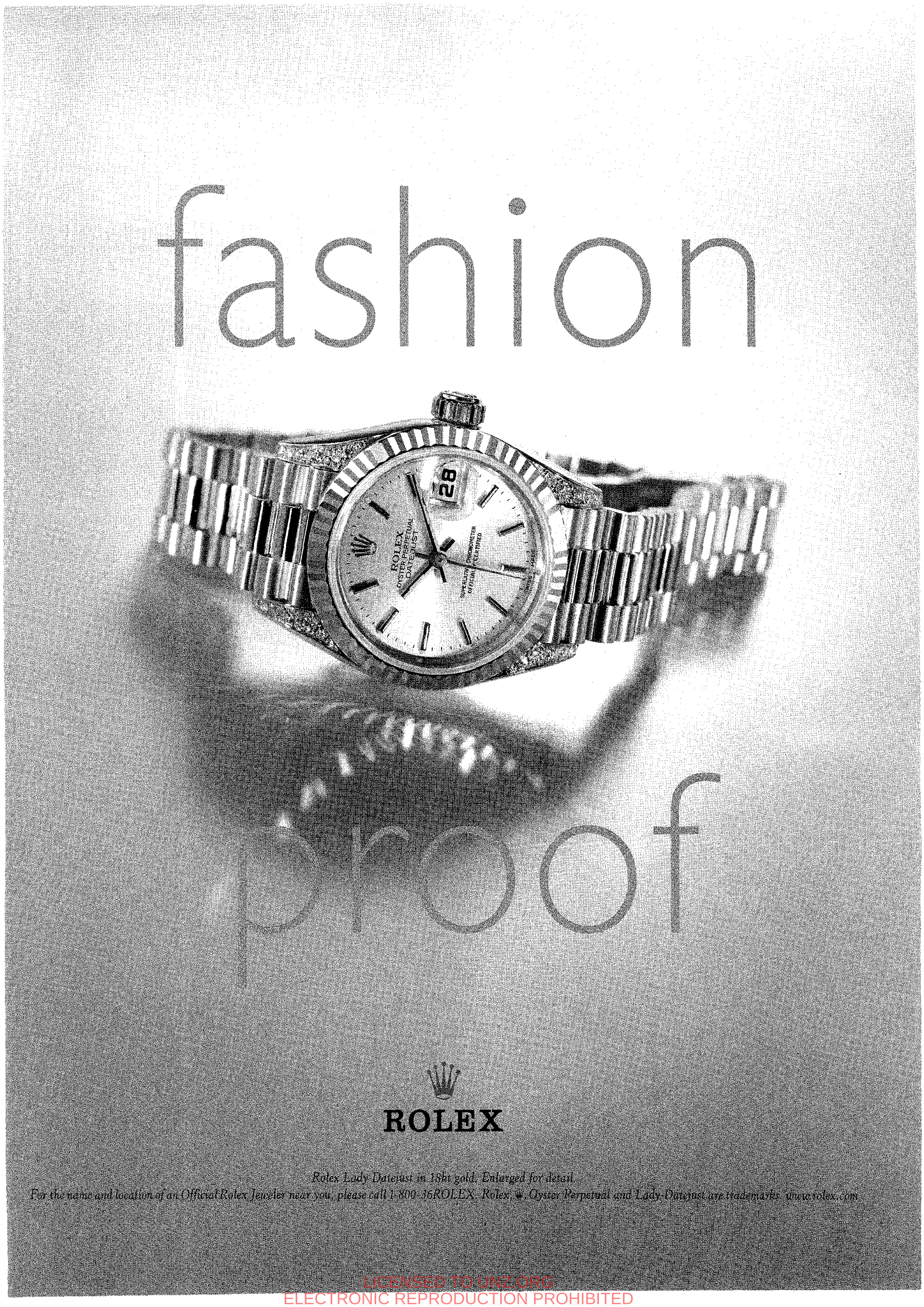

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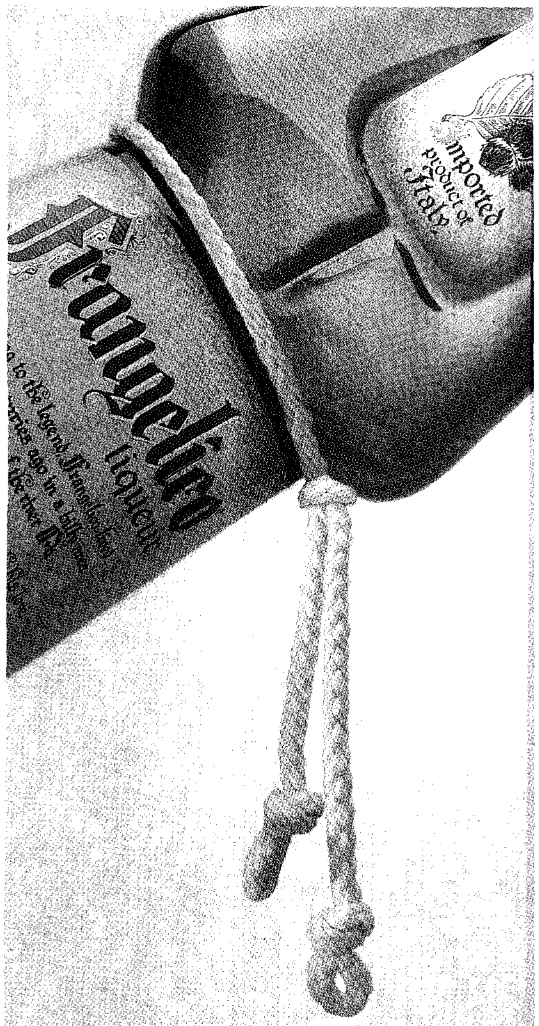

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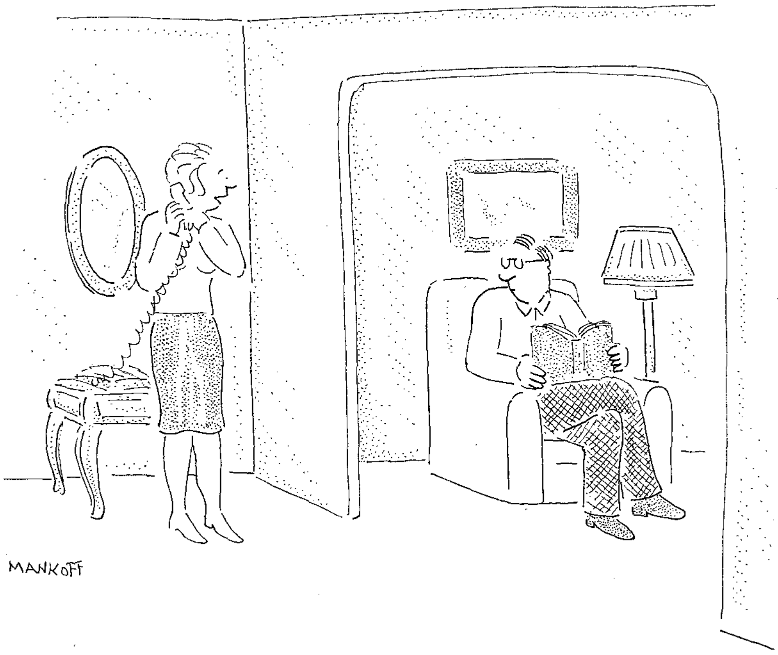

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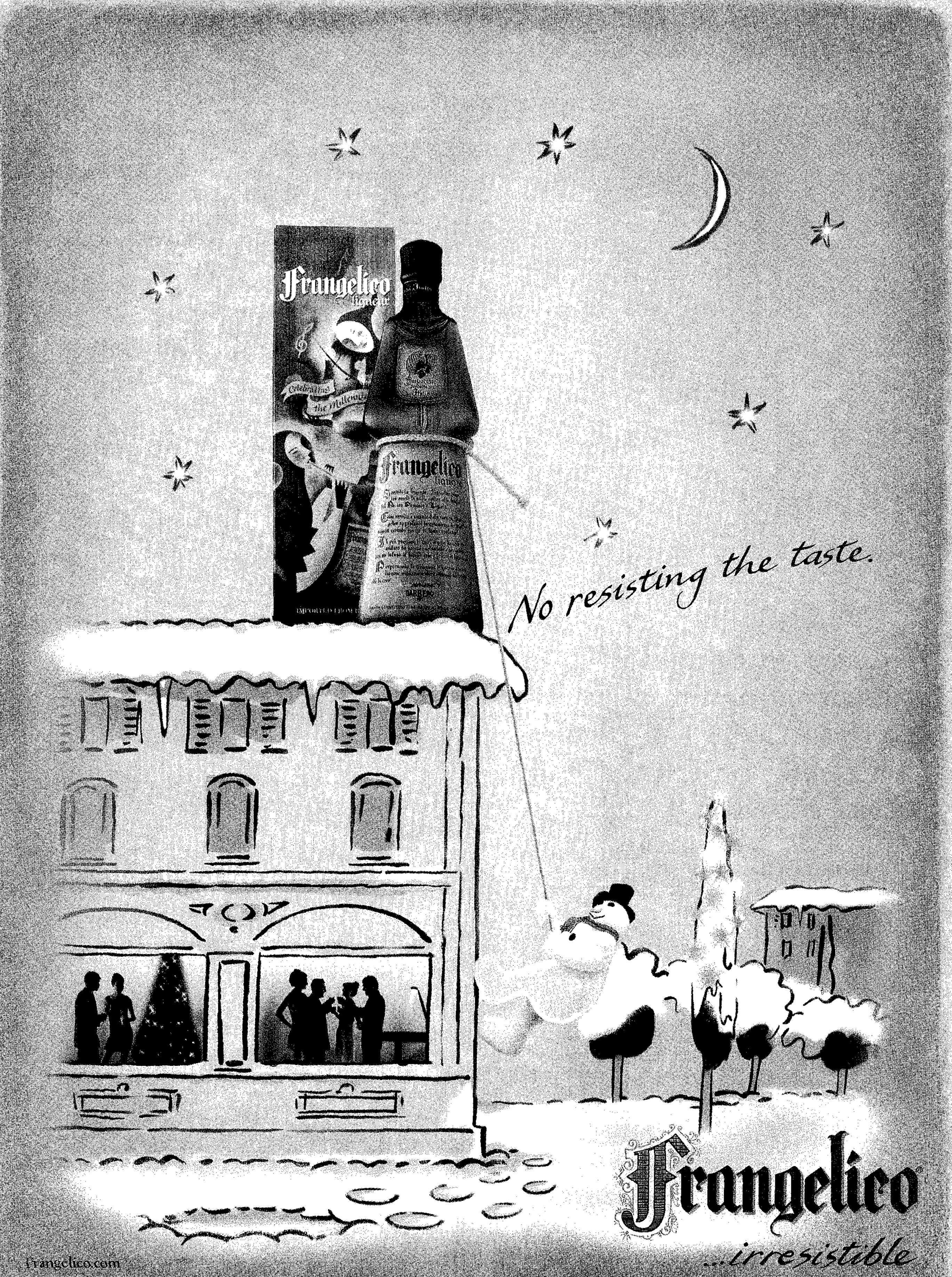
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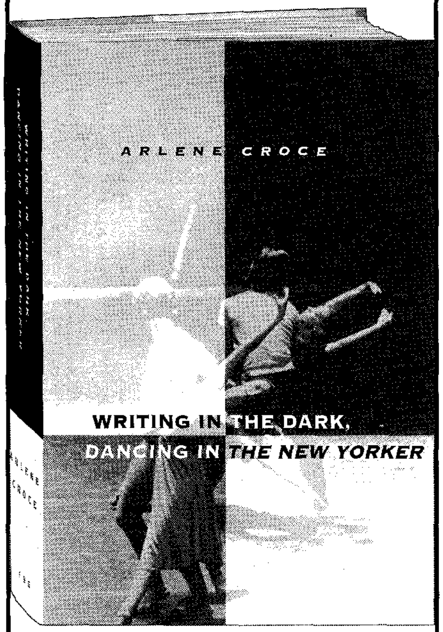

WRITING IN THE DARK, DANCING IN *THE NEW YORKER*

ARLENE CROCE

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FARRAR STRAUS GIROUX

THE MAIL

WHO'S WORKING HARDER?

If John Cassidy had tried for a more balanced story, he would have discovered that the increase in productivity growth, while it is hardly a "miracle," is no illusion, either ("The Productivity Mirage," November 27th). For instance, he writes that in financial services "productivity growth has lagged for years," as if A.T.M.s, direct deposits, or on-line trading had never happened. He also attacks the method known as hedonic pricing—which increases the value of an industry's goods to reflect technical improvements—for excessively boosting measured output in the computer sector and, hence, over-all productivity. If the bloated statistic he cites had been the final one, he would have a point; in fact, the government adjusts its figures to avoid this very problem. As a result, the actual increase in productivity from hedonics is not as great as he suggests. And Cassidy neglects the importance of accounting for increased quality, as though it would not matter if Ford's only product were still the black Model T. Since 1995, in any event, the "hedonic-free" rate of productivity growth has still been about twice that of previous decades.

Cassidy ends by posing his killer question: If U.S. productivity gains are so great, why are Americans working harder than ever? Maybe it is because Americans are a materialistic people, glad to reap the bounty of improved productivity, but greedy for more, and willing to work for it.

Gene Epstein
Economics Editor, Barron's
New York City

Cassidy's piece offered an excellent insight into why the New Economy may be oversold. The growth of the last few years has relied on a revival of the old method of having workers take home piecework. The real technological shift is not in the sphere of productivity but in making the workplace transportable. We have gone from developing labor-saving devices to developing labor-delivering devices like the laptop, the cell phone, and high-speed residential Internet connections. The problem is that growth becomes a creature of working hours. Firms hit the wall when they can no longer get more hours from the people they have, or from new recruits. If the failure of high-tech firms to find the workers they need triggers a recession in the broader economy, we may face a supreme irony: unemployment caused by a labor shortage.

Douglas Green
Vancouver, Wash.

PARTY ON

Do we really need another vote against partisanship? The endless and uncritical calls for bipartisanship, which Joe Klein repeats, have shut out important debates about the environment, child welfare, and crime (The Talk of the Town, November 20th). Klein blithely urges candidates to emulate John F. Kennedy, who put Republicans and Independents like Robert McNamara, Dean Rusk, and McGeorge Bundy in his Cabinet. Are these architects of Vietnam, one of the most disastrous chapters in our history, the best proof he has that bipartisanship works?

Janice Bailey
Manchester, N.H.

EDITORS' NOTE: We have learned that in his piece "My Fake Job" (November 27th) Rodney Rothman changed identifying details about the workplace and described an incident—a massage at the office, as it happens—that did not take place. Also, the author should have revealed that his mother worked at the company. The magazine does not disguise details or mix fact and fiction without informing the reader (not even in a comic piece like this one), and we sincerely regret the error.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to "The Mail," The New Yorker, 4 Times Square, New York, N.Y. 10036. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047 or sent via E-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

LAURENT CILLUFFO

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

A CHILD'S GARDEN
From the Melting Pot Theatre, a musical based on Robert Louis Stevenson's "A Child's Garden of Verses." With music by Louis Rosen, who co-wrote the book with Arthur Perlman and Charlotte Maier. In previews through Dec. 9. Opens Dec. 10 at 5. (Theatre 3, at 311 W. 43rd St. 279-4200.)

THE BITTER TEARS OF PETRA VON KANT
A staged version of the Fassbinder film about a lesbian love affair, adapted by Barbara Saurman and Ian Belton. In previews through Dec. 10. Opens Dec. 11 at 8. (Henry Miller Theatre, 124 W. 43rd St. 279-4200.)

JANE EYRE
The musical. Marla Schaffel is Jane; James Barbour is Rochester. With a book by John Caird and a score by Paul Gordon. Directed by Mr. Caird and Scott Schwartz. In previews through Dec. 9. Opens Dec. 10 at 3. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

OLD MONEY
A new play by Wendy Wasserstein, under the direction of Mark Brokaw. John Cullum, Mary Beth Hurt, and Dan Butler are in the cast. Two previews on Dec. 6. Opens Dec. 7 at 6:45. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

PETE 'N' KEELY
A pair of singing stars, formerly a married duo, are reunited on a television variety show in 1968, in a musical comedy by James Hindman. With sets by Ray Klausen and costumes by Bob Mackie. In previews. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

PRINCESS TURANDOT
Darko Tresnjak's new play was inspired by Cozzi's 1792 fable, the operas of Puccini and Busoni, "The Arabian Nights," and the films of Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. Preview on Dec. 6. Opens Dec. 7 at 8. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 206-1515.)

OPENED RECENTLY

ALICE IN BED
Susan Sontag's 1993 fantasy play, which was inspired by the journals of Henry and William James's sister, Alice. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475. Closes Dec. 9.)

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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BAAL
Bertolt Brecht's first play, produced by Jim Simpson and his lively Bat Theatre Company. The script suffers from many first-play problems, but it clearly presents several of Brecht's preoccupations, and Michael J. X. Gladis, as Baal, is provocative from the first word he speaks. (Flea Theatre, 41 White St., between Broadway and Church St. 226-2407. Closes Dec. 16.)

BETRAYAL
A revival of Harold Pinter's 1978 bleak comedy of manners about the blithe treachery of adultery and the thousand little lies that can make and break a friendship. Juliette Binoche, inexplicably, stars as a publisher's wife who has had a long affair with her husband's best friend, a literary agent. Binoche can do happy, she can do sad, but she brings no definition, no specificity, to her role. Her words, and her silences, speak not volumes but leaflets. Liev Schreiber, as her lover, and John Slattery, as her husband, do better with their parts—particularly Slattery, who combines emotional nakedness with reserve to portray the terribly comic aspects of trauma. Draggily directed by David Leveaux. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/27/00.) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-9393.)

BOOK OF THE DEAD: SECOND AVENUE
John Moran's first techno-opera in five years, set in ancient Egypt and on New York City's Second Avenue, doesn't pack quite the same punch that his earlier works did. Despite the fact that the scenes and allegories are slow to mesh, Moran's method—he uses recorded sounds and voices to build his otherworldly environments—is strange, powerful, and unlike anything else you'll see in the theatre today. There's no describing it: you just have to go. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400. Closes Dec. 17.)

COBB
An encore production of Lee Blessing's play about the baseball legend Ty Cobb, which was originally staged by the Melting Pot Theatre last spring. (Lucille Lortel Theatre, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

COMIC POTENTIAL
Or not. Alan Ayckbourn's futuristic farce about an android actress (Janie Dee) who becomes plagued by human feelings for an idealistic young screenwriter might have had the potential to be funny forty years ago, but today it's sub-sitcom pap. Even as a vehicle for the talents of the gravel-voiced British actress Dee, it falls embarrassingly short, despite some amusing moments. It also smacks of misogyny: Dee's programmable "actoid" is the sole woman in the show whose emotional makeup appeals to the men; her only competition is a pair of smart but dismissive lesbians and a desperate, angry, over-the-hill man-eater. Har. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

CRAVE
Deborah Harry stars in the late British playwright Sarah Kane's examination of the dark side of human relationships. (Axis, 1 Sheridan Sq. 807-9300. Closes Dec. 28.)

THE DINNER PARTY
Neil Simon's new comedy is set in an opulent restaurant in Paris, and his six characters—three divorced couples—are not the usual Simon-Americans of his "Suite" plays. They are French, or are meant to be. Still, the play is essentially traditional fare; the running, or limping, gags are in ready supply, and the secondhand shtick, often in the form of aeons-old alimony jokes, flows freely along this Boulevard of Broken Marriages. (11/6/00) (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

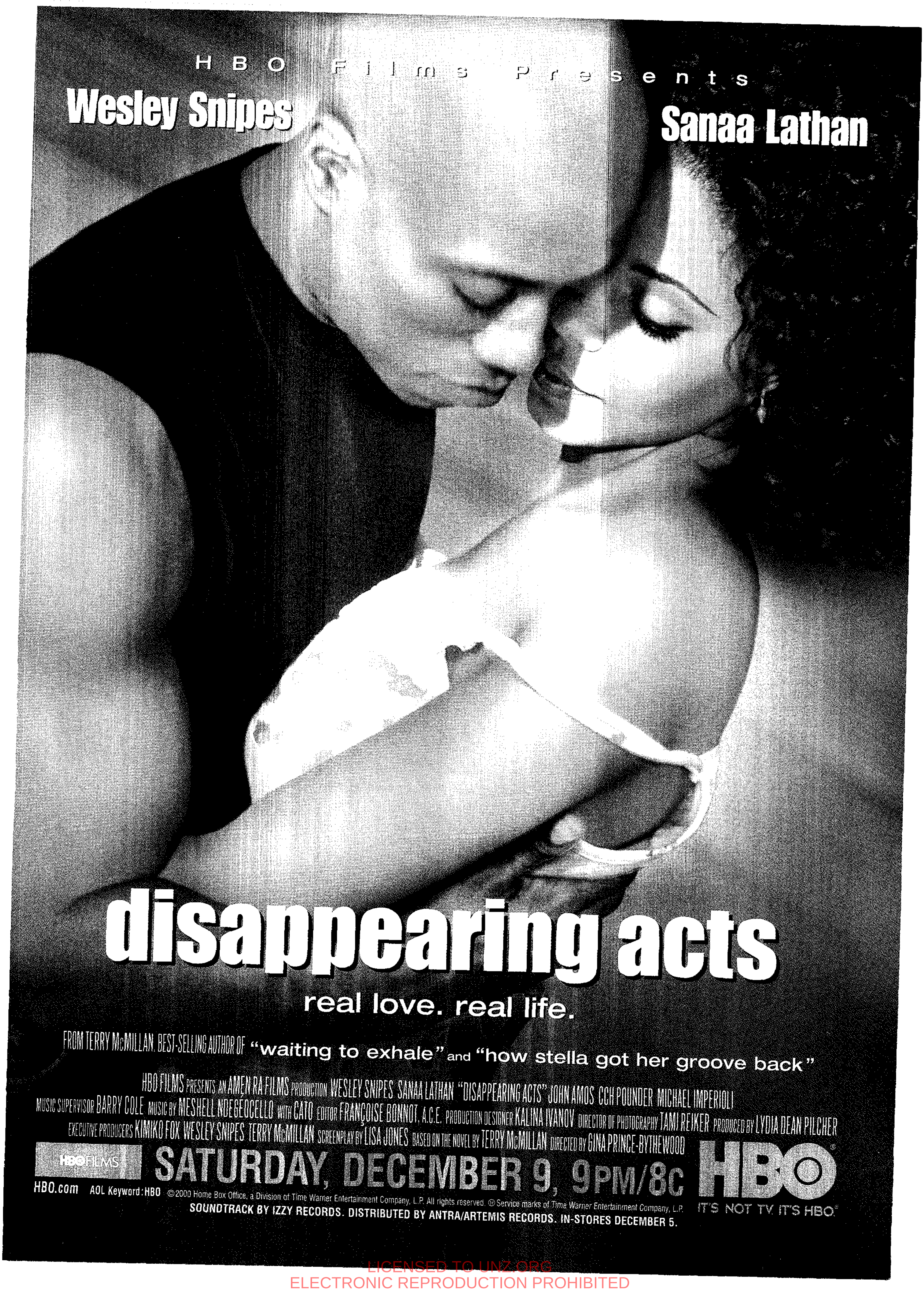
DOWN THE GARDEN PATHS
Eli Wallach and Anne Jackson lead the cast in a new four-couple comedy by Anne Meara. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 307-4100.)

FERMAT'S LAST TANGO
Pythagoras, Newton, Euclid, and Gauss are characters in a mathematical musical by Joanne Sydney Lessner and Joshua Rosenblum, staged by the York Theatre Company. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 239-6200.)

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 2001: A SPOOF ODYSSEY
The latest edition of Gerard Alessandrini's ongoing musical satire of the players and the plays along the Great White Way. (Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200.)

FOUR GUYS NAMED JOSÉ . . . AND UNA MUJER NAMED MARIA
This crowd-pleasing, crayon-colored revue of Latin song and dance is knowingly broad and hammy. But the talented cast sends up the singers and songs that helped create Latin stereotypes and delivers the remaining material—dance songs, songs of nostalgia for one's homeland, songs of love, songs about women named Maria—with exuberant wit and affection. (Blue Angel, 323 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

THE FULL MONTY
The musical version of the 1997 movie, about a group of unemployed factory workers who try to



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earn some cash by stripping, is faithful to the original story—even though the locale has been shifted from the North of England to Buffalo. It has all the spirit and charm of the original but, as befits a Broadway production, on a much larger, pizzazzier scale. Instead of being touched, you're likely to be moved up out of your seat by the display of musical and choreographic bravura onstage. Early on, Terrence McNally's book and David Yazbek's songs strike notes of class consciousness and unemployment-related low male self-esteem a little too hard, but soon enough the show's winning good humor and inventiveness kick in, and if you don't find yourself laughing consistently (and tearing up occasionally), well, then, maybe you don't *deserve* to see six men prancing around in red G-strings. The terrific cast, which includes Patrick Wilson, John Ellison Conlee, André De Shields, Emily Skinner, and Kathleen Freeman, is under the fine direction of Jack O'Brien, and the dancing is courtesy of Jerry Mitchell. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

GAME SHOW
The action of Bob Walton and Jeffrey Finn's "play" clumsily shifts from a trivia contest between audience volunteers to scripted, behind-the-scenes backstabbing between the producer (Cheryl Stern) and the host (Michael McGrath) of the show within the show. The drama that unfolds during the "commercial breaks" is flat, but the participatory sequences are surprisingly amusing, if only because they involve laughing at the contestants (at a recent show, a professional woman defined a "gynephobe" as a person who is afraid of giants). (45 Bleecker, at 45 Bleecker St. 307-4100.)

GERSHWIN'S AMERICAN RHAPSODY
KT Sullivan and Mark Nadler star in a musical revue celebrating the works of George Gershwin. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 239-6200.)

GORE VIDAL'S THE BEST MAN
Gore Vidal's sophisticated, elegant, and damned entertaining 1960 play about the politics of politics, whose mots are as eerily accurate for Shrub and Al as they were, originally, for Adlai and Tricky Dick. (10/2/00) (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

THE GOREY DETAILS
A musical inspired by the works of the author-illustrator Edward Gorey. (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

THE HOSTAGE
Brendan Behan's 1960 play is set in that year, a moment of relative peace in Ireland, and it raises the question of whether anyone other than a few fanatics really cared anymore about the country's entanglement with England. Forty years on, Behan's political views are still fresh, and the play itself is a fascinating mixture of tragedy and fun, like a good pub tale. The talented cast is directed by Charlotte Moore. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes Dec. 10.)

THE HOUSE OF BERNARDA ALBA
The National Asian American Theatre Company offers Chay Yew's adaptation of the all-female Lorca drama. (INTAR II, 508 W. 53rd St. 718-623-1672.)

JESUS HOPPED THE 'A' TRAIN
A six-week encore run of Stephen Adly Guirgis's drama about the relationship between two convicts in protective custody at Riker's Island. Philip Seymour Hoffman is the director. (East 13th Street Theatre, 136 E. 13th St. 239-6200.)

JULIUS CAESAR
The British-American Aquila Theatre Company's modern-dress staging of Shakespeare's play. (Clark Studio Theatre, 70 Lincoln Center Plaza. 279-4200.)

JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK
Even a spirited performance by Jim Nelson, as the feckless, braggart "paycock" of the title, can't get this otherwise flat Roundabout Theatre production of Sean O'Casey's 1924 tragicomedy off the ground. (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

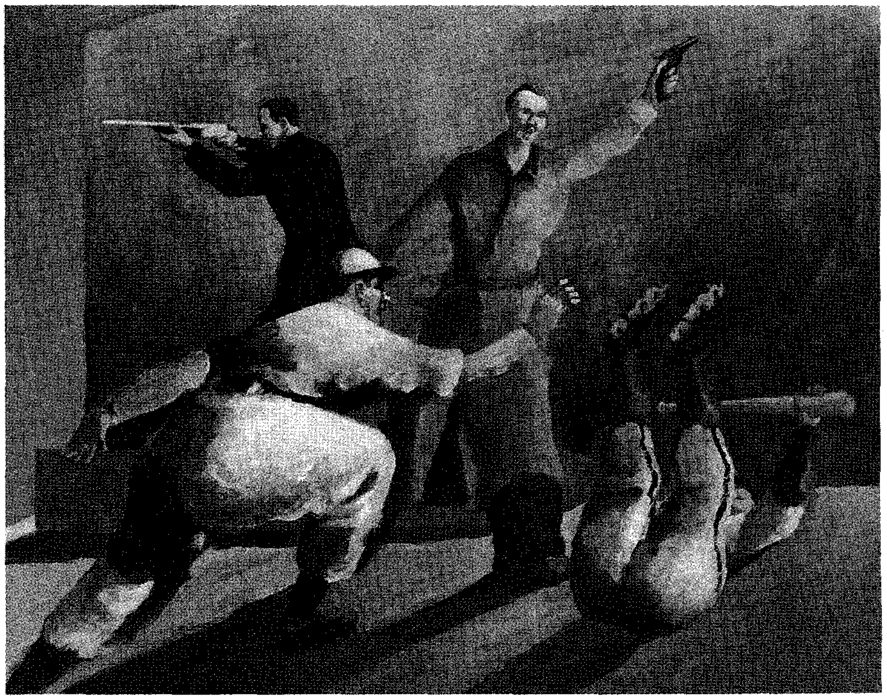
THE LAST OF THE THORNTONS
The last living member of a powerful Texas clan looks back on her family's legacy, in Horton Foote's new play. (Signature Theatre Company, 555 W. 42nd St. 244-7529.)

THE LIGHT OUTSIDE
From the Flea Theatre, a black domestic comedy by Kate Robin. (41 White St., between Broadway and Church St. 226-2407. Closes Dec. 16.)

LIVING IN THE WIND
Cheryl Freeman and Chad L. Coleman portray married ex-slaves trying to rebuild their lives after the Civil War, in a romantic drama by Michael Bradford. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

LYPSINKA! THE BOXED SET
The star (a.k.a. John Epperson) makes her first concert appearance in seven years. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 307-4100.)

MAYBE BABY, IT'S YOU
Love in the big city, explained with many laughs by the show's accomplished writer-performers, Charlie Shanian and Shari Simpson. There's an undercurrent of sweetness and longing which makes the evening more than a series of skits. (Theatre at St. Luke's, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)



The Melting Pot Theatre's production of "Cobb," by Lee Blessing.

ALAIN PILON

MINT THEATRE COMPANY
Presenting a double bill of one-acts: Harley Granville-Barker's "Farewell to the Theatre" and George Kelley's "The Flattering Word." (311 W. 43rd St. 315-0231. Closes Dec. 17.)

PROOF
The Manhattan Theatre Club's staging of David Auburn's drama, starring Mary-Louise Parker, has reopened on Broadway. Daniel Sullivan is the director. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

RICHARD III
The Pearl Theatre Company's version of Shakespeare's play. (80 St. Mark's Pl. 505-9802. Closes Dec. 17.)

THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW
Rather than a revival of Richard O'Brien's 1973 musical, Christopher Ashley's production is an unsexy and oddly earnest homage to the 1975 cult-movie adaptation. It plays to the already converted (who can dance the Time Warp with the help of a ten-dollar "participation bag" containing confetti, a light-up key chain, and toilet paper), but it offers the rest of the audience no sense of irony and no insight into why, or how, O'Brien's glam tribute to fifties horror movies became such a phenomenon. The only air of self-parody comes from the impish Dick Cavett; as the narrator, he gives the show a shot of vitality with his improvised standup shtick and, if you're lucky, his version of the Moonwalk. The rest of the casting is inspired (although Lea DeLaria and Joan Jett are sadly underused), but the performers can't really compete with their celluloid counterparts. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

SAVED OR DESTROYED
Rattlestick starts the season with a Harry Kondoleon festival, beginning with this previously unproduced comedy. (Rattlestick Theatre, 224 Waverly Pl. 206-1515.)

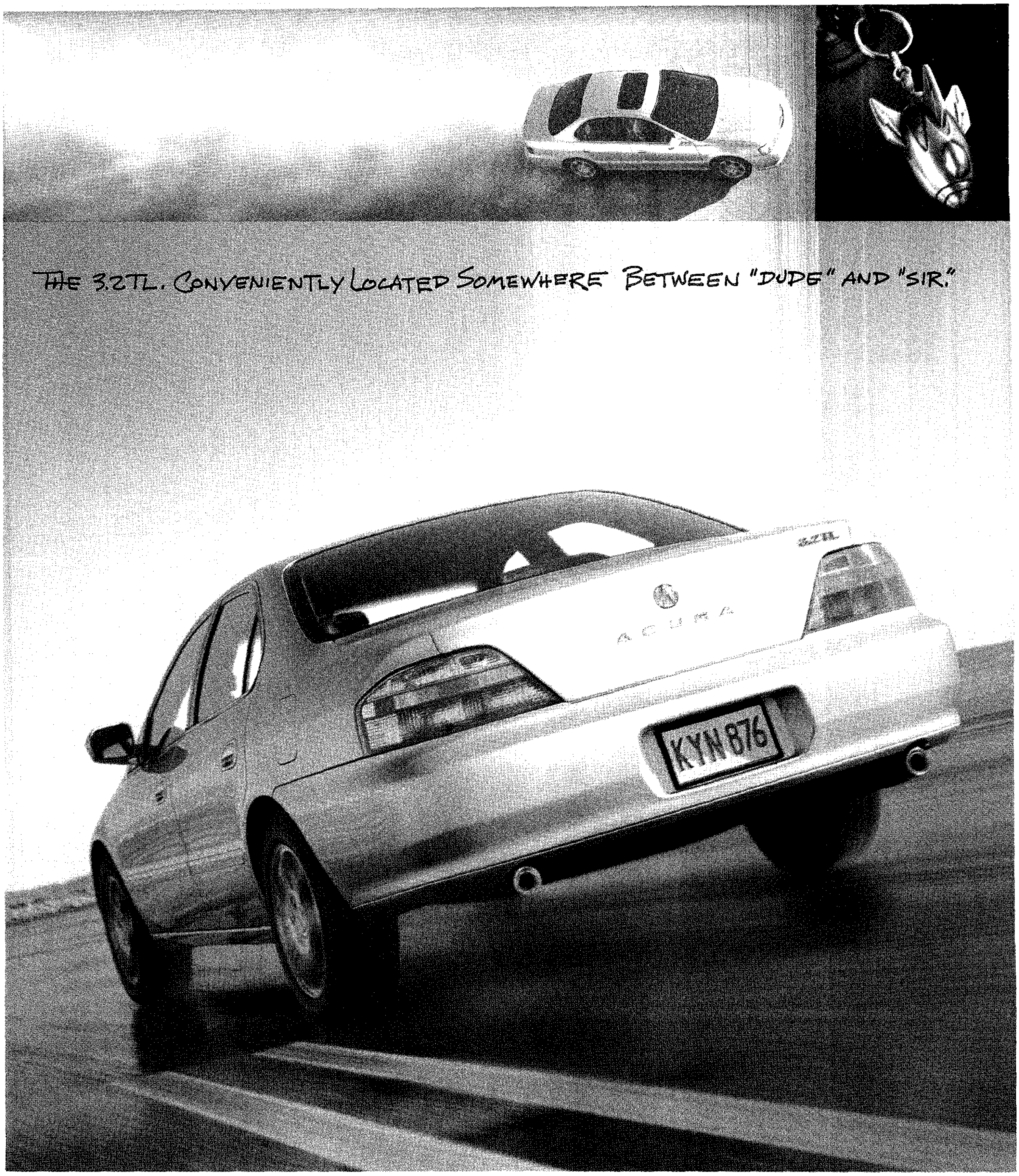
THE SEARCH FOR SIGNS OF INTELLIGENT LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE
Lily Tomlin is back on Broadway in the one-woman, thirteen-character show written for her by her longtime collaborator, Jane Wagner, and what's not to love about that? Tomlin is terrific—moving, funny, and as lithe and vibrant as she was when she first performed the show here, fifteen years ago. If anything, her characterizations are better now: they're grittier and less tinged with whimsy. Wagner's observations are so trenchant that you can't help wishing that she had written some new, up-to-date characters for this production, but, as it is, this is a chance to see a remarkable life force in action. (11/27/00) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

SECRET HISTORY
The latest installment in Ping Chong's "Undesirable Elements" series, in which he creates a script from interviews with his cast, chosen for their stories of cultural displacement. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 529-1557.)

SEUSSICAL
A new musical by the team of Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty which blends stories and characters from the books of Dr. Seuss. Frank Galati is the director. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

THE SYRINGA TREE
A tour-de-force solo drama, written by and starring South African native and first-time playwright Pamela Gien, who gives an extraordinary performance in all twenty-three roles. It's a love story, really, about the strong, lasting bond between a white girl and her black nanny in South Africa, which begins in 1965 and continues through the following twenty years of turbulent and violent upheavals over apartheid. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 307-4100.)

TABLETOP
Rob Ackerman's real-time comedy, a behind-the-scenes look at television-commercial making. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)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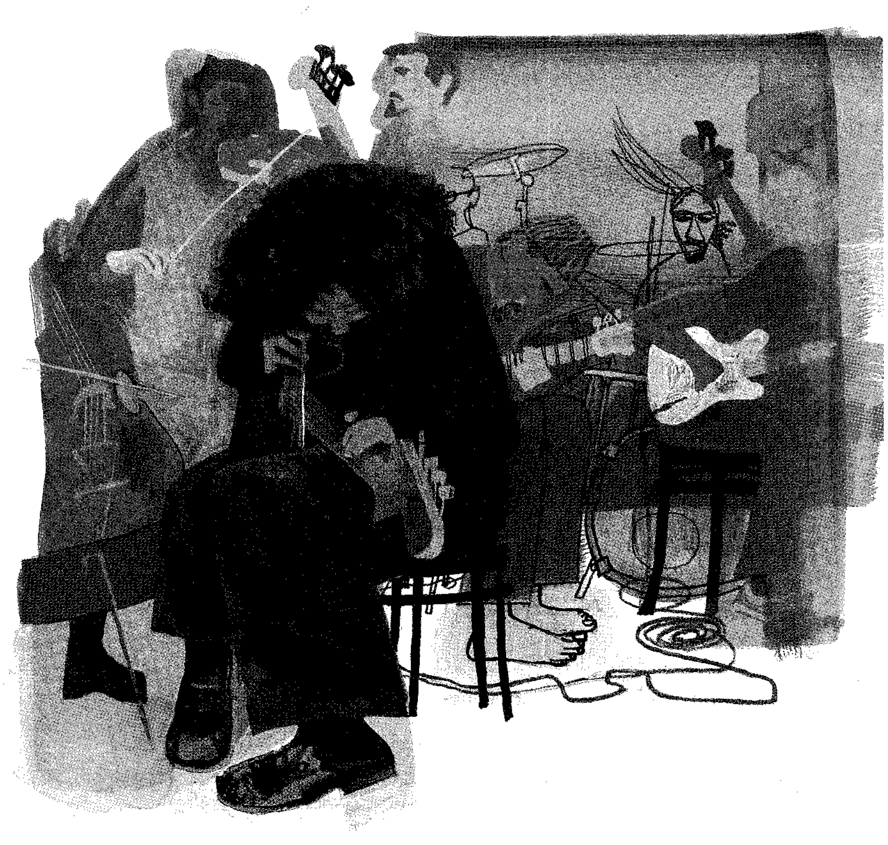

At the Bowery Ballroom, godspeed you black emperor! (see Nightlife).

ANNABEL WRIGHT

THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIST'S WIFE
Charles Busch's satire of New York intellectual angst, staged by Manhattan Theatre Club, has moved to Broadway. Linda Lavin, Tony Roberts, and Michele Lee star. Lynn Meadow is the director. (3/20/00) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

TALLULAH HALLELUJAH!
Tovah Feldshuh's engaging portrait of Tallulah Bankhead is set in 1956, at a U.S.O. benefit, where the stage-and-screen siren (played by Feldshuh) regales the audience with the lowdown on her life, several marvellous standards, and a bunch of charmingly dirty limericks. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

TINY ALICE
Laila Robins and Richard Thomas star in a Second Stage revival of Edward Albee's 1965 drama. (307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422.)

THE UNEXPECTED MAN
There are only two actors in this small gem by Yasmina Reza, the author of "Art," but they are not just any two—they are Alan Bates and the magnificent Eileen Atkins, who are sharing a compartment on a Paris-to-Frankfurt train. He is a writer, and she, unbeknownst to him, is his ideal reader; their private reflections weave around and play off each other until the two passengers finally address each other directly. Reza's artfulness in presenting their thoughts—his discontent, her insightful analysis of his books and rueful reminiscences of friendships—makes this a very grownup play about separateness and connection, about the art of life. Directed by Matthew Warchus. (11/6/00) (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

WHAT THE BUTLER SAW
It's a treat to see Chloë Sevigny onstage, even in the New Group's inert production of Joe Orton's bawdy 1969 sex farce. The last few moments—when cases of mistaken identity have been solved and all sets of clothing have been returned to their rightful owners—are sublime, but the road that leads to them is rather rocky. The director Scott Elliot's pacing is off, and his actors have a difficult time muscling the Wildean dialogue. There are laughs to be had here; they just come paired with groans. (Theatre at St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200. Closes Dec. 10.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370.

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.

CONTACT
Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.

COPENHAGEN
Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE COUNTESS
Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

DINNER WITH FRIENDS
Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave., at 14th St. 239-6200.

DIRTY BLONDE
Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

THE FANTASTICKS
Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838.

FOSSE
Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

FULLY COMMITTED
Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.

JITNEY
Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 505-0700.

KISS ME, KATE
Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.

THE MUSIC MAN
Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.

RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.

SWING!
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
The company returns with "The Nutcracker." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 870-5570. Dec. 6-7 and Dec. 12 at 6, Dec. 8 at 8, Dec. 9 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 10 at 1 and 5.)

ALVIN AILEY
Dec. 6 at 8: "Night Creature," "Pas de Duke," "The River," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 7 at 8: "Divining," "Sweet Bitter Love," "Double Exposure," and "Grace." ♦ Dec. 8 at 8: "Phases," "Following the Subtle Current Upstream," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 9 at 2: "Blues Suite," "Cry," "Double Exposure," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 9 at 8: "Divining," "Sweet Bitter Love," "Phases," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 10 at 3: "Blues Suite," "Sweet Bitter Love," "Phases," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 12 at 8: "Streams," "Chocolate Sessions," "Grace," and "Hymn." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Through Dec. 31.)

"TO LIE TENDERLY"
In 1998, the choreographer David Dorfman created his first work to a rock score, Joe Jackson's CD "Heaven and Hell." Now he's made a dance, "To Lie Tenderly," about the sort of sixties-style rock band where everyone is "in on the process." "If it wasn't for this distance between us, I think I'd be you," a dancer/rocker in a glam fifteenth-century doublet confides to the audience. At one stop on the band's interminable tour, he and five others are stuck at a barren rest stop-cum-drive-in movie, where the screen shows, in dream time and in fragmented form, the hurtling and tumbling movements the audience has just seen performed live. Throughout the piece, the composer Amy Denio and her four-person band play echoey songs that weave in and out of the drama like a film score. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Dec. 6 and Dec. 8-9 at 7:30 and Dec. 10 at 3.)

BALLET HISPANICO
The company, under the direction of Tina Ramirez, commissions choreographers of all stripes to create works that take on some aspect of Hispanic life. The resulting pieces show off the talented company. This season's premières come from Ramón Oller ("Eyes of the Soul") and Pedro Ruiz ("Club Havana"). (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Dec. 5 at 7:30, Dec. 6-8 and Dec. 12 at 8, Dec. 9 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 10 at 2 and 7:30. Through Dec. 17.)

BILL SHANNON, A.K.A. CRUTCHMASTER
The onetime skateboarder continues to indulge antigravitational urges, even though a rare ailment, Legg-Calve-Perthes disease (his bones cannot continuously support his weight), has forced him to do his dancing on crutches. For this engagement, he alternates performances of "Old Rain" and "Regarding the Fall" (the former starts at 8:30, the latter at 10). (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Dec. 7-10.)

RISA JAROSLAW AND DANCERS
The seven-member company presents two premières, "Table Talk," which grew out of discussions the choreographer led with troubled single mothers, and "Home/Wire Walking," about women's many roles at home, at work, and at play. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Dec. 7-9 at 8:30 and Dec. 10 at 4 and 8:30.)

"ANOTHER TELEPATHIC THING"
Big Dance Theatre, under the direction of Paul Lazar and the choreographer Annie-B Parson, recasts Mark Twain's "The Mysterious Stranger" as the story of Satan in L.A., using sections from actual Hollywood audition tapes. (The Performing Garage, 35 Wooster St. 966-3651. Dec. 6-8 at 8 and Dec. 9 at 3 and 8.)

"NEITHER"
An intimate, hour-long work by Doug Varone and Dancers follows the company through various rooms of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. (90 Orchard St. 800-965-4827. Dec. 5-9 at 7:30 and 9:30 and Dec. 10 at 6:30 and 8:30. Through Dec. 17.)

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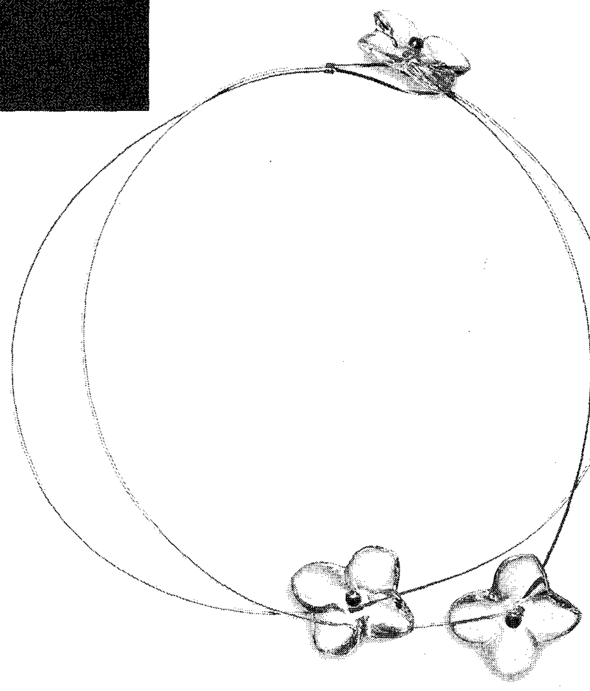

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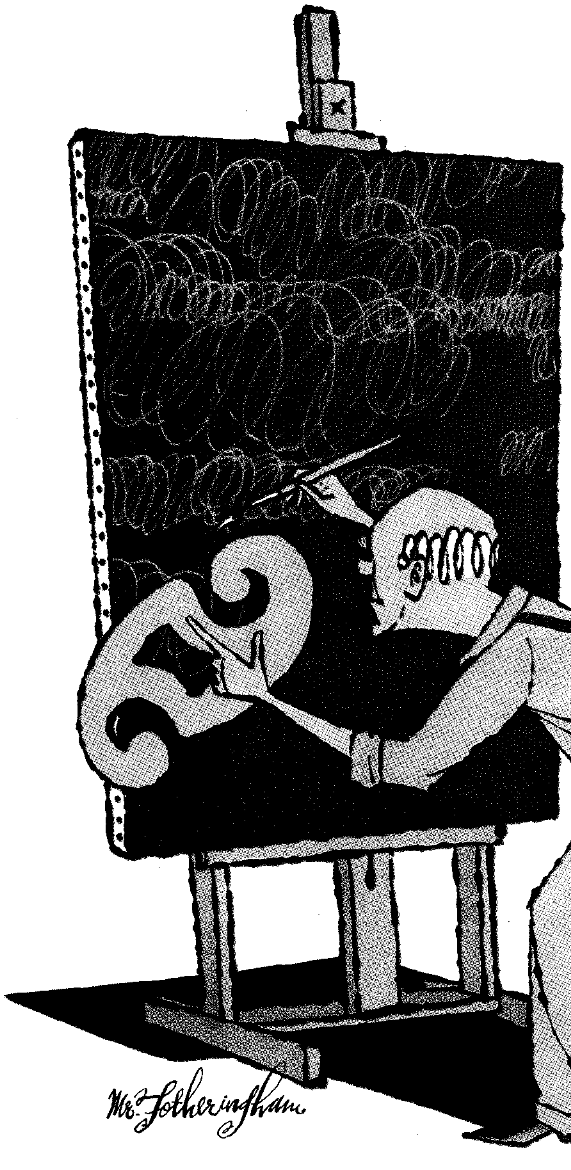
NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

"A CARIBBEAN CHRISTMAS"
The Invaders Steel Orchestra and Shadow, the 2000 Calypso Monarch of Trinidad and Tobago, add a little tropical heat to the holiday season. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. Dec. 6 at 8.)

"LOSER'S LOUNGE"
The keyboardist and cultural archeologist Joe McGinty and his band of merry pranksters turn the spotlight on one of their favorite subjects, Neil Diamond. (Westbeth Theatre, 151 Bank St. 741-0391. Dec. 6-7 at 8 and Dec. 8-9 at 9.)



New work by Cy Twombly, the master of the illegible scrawl, at Gagosian uptown.

LINCOLN CENTER JAZZ ORCHESTRA
Nineteen-twenties New Orleans and its most glorious scion, Louis Armstrong, are celebrated. Joining the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra and its leader, Wynton Marsalis, whose palpable pleasure in this music is reason enough to catch these centenary shows, are such Crescent City natives as the trombonist Lucien Barbarin and the guitarist and banjo player Don Vappie, along with the brilliant clarinettist Bob Wilber, who's been assimilating the musical strains of the Big Easy since he was a lad in nineteen-forties Westchester. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. Dec. 7 and Dec. 9 at 8.)

PAUL SIMON
Nearly three years after the underrated, if overinflated, "Capeman" project was publicly disembowelled, Rhymin' Simon returns with "You're the One," a collection of straightforward, radio-friendly tunes. With his world-beat predilections now commonplace and his theatrical grandeur tightly reined in, Simon's major themes—love, aging, and spiritual searching—are less artfully mined. There's no doubt that he's still the brainiest songwriter on the block, but his occasional missteps and wooden pedantries risk turning him into the Al Gore of popular music. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. Dec. 7-9 at 8.)

DIO
The iron-lunged former singer for Rainbow and Black Sabbath preaches to the converted. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. Dec. 9 at 7:30.)

STEPHEN BUCHANAN
Buchanan is a dancer and a composer from Philadelphia who now lives in Switzerland. His specialty is the "bucussion," a percussion instrument of his own devising that he plays with his feet. It somehow also involves the saxophone (he studied with Marshall Allen, of the Sun Ra Arkestra). To Buchanan his instrument is just the natural evolution of the traps, and he says it's "like a percussion orchestra, like samba at carnival." (See also Galapagos, in Clubs.) (Glass Farm Concerts, 438 W. 37th St. 244-6422. Dec. 9 at 8.)

"CHRISTMAS IN THE CARIBBEAN II"
The calypso great the Mighty Sparrow headlines another evening of steel drums and Yuletide spirit, with Carlene Davis, Singing Sandra, Crazy, Brother Marvin, and others. (Whitman Theatre, Brooklyn College. 718-951-4500. Dec. 9 at 8.)

DWIGHT CARRIER
Manhattan is starting to take on the rhythmic spirit of Lawtell, Louisiana. This little town, in the southwestern corner of the state, midway between Opelousas and Eunice, is the home of Roy Carrier's zydeco night club, the Offshore Lounge. Roy and his band, the Nite-Rockers, played here three weeks ago, and now his twenty-six-year-old nephew Dwight takes the stage with his outfit, the Ro Doggs. Count your blessings. (La Belle Époque, 827 Broadway, between 12th and 13th Sts. For more information, call 685-7597. Dec. 10 at 7:30.)

DAVE MATTHEWS BAND
Updating the time-honored Grateful Dead formula for the new millennium, Matthews and his multiracial, multi-instrumental ensemble have turned endless touring and long, baroque jams into enormous success. In the two years since his last studio album, "Before These Crowded Streets," Matthews has released two concert recordings, including last year's "Live at Luther College," a two-CD acoustic set that demonstrated that, separated from the improvisational histrionics of his band, Matthews is also capable of genuine intimacy and subtle phrasing. (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Dec. 12-13 at 7:30.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

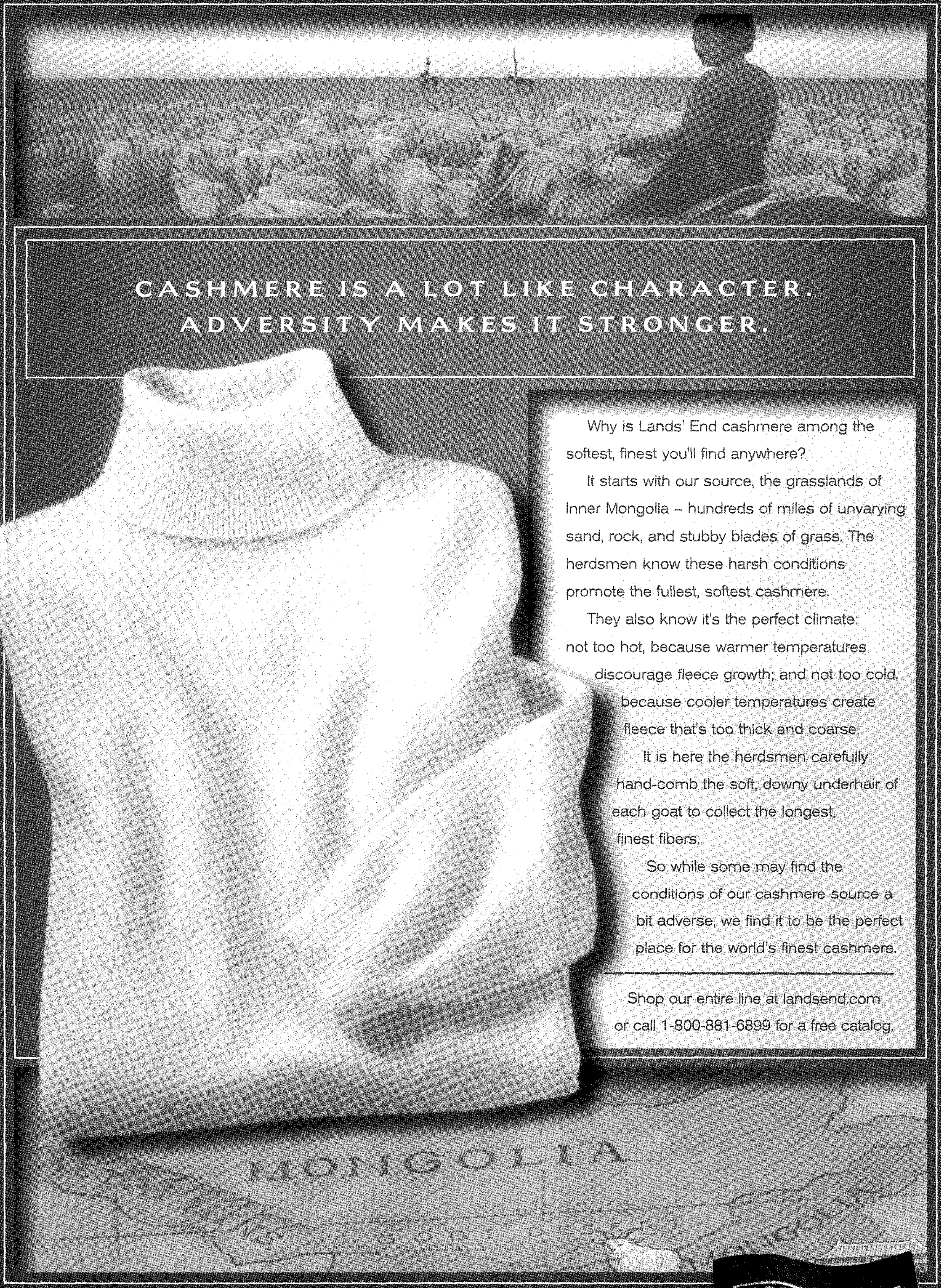
BAM CAFÉ
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4139)—Dec. 9: **Antibalas,** a fourteen-piece Afro-beat ensemble from Williamsburg, Brooklyn, which takes its musical and political inspiration from Fela Kuti. Its shows are a thunderous mass of rhythms, horns, and bass.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
243 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—Dec. 7-9: When he opened this club a few months back, **B. B. King** played a short, sharp set, and he looked as pleased as Punch to be at home in the center of New York City. This extended engagement is a welcome thing. Dec. 10-11: Slippin' into darkness with the seminal seventies funk band **War.**

BOTTOM LINE
15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Dec. 8-9: The former Styx guitarist **Glen Burtnik** throws his annual "Xmas X-Travaganza." Dec. 12: "A Truckstop Christmas" features **Dale Watson,** a tattooed singer-guitarist out of Austin, who plays honky-tonk as if he were on a mission from God—or at least from Merle Haggard—and **Joy Lynn White,** a tough-as-nails Nashville bombshell, and that doesn't describe just her voice.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Dec. 5-7: **godspeed you black emperor!** This nine-member collective from Montreal uses guitars, violins, field recordings, drums, cellos, and grainy sixteen-millimetre footage to create kaleidoscopes of sound and images which are full of an almost religious fervor. Steadfastly independent, godspeed has built a grassroots following that's grown far beyond the band's informal beginnings playing underground parties. See them now, while they're still performing in relatively intimate settings. Dec. 11: **PJ Harvey.** Polly Jean Harvey, the leader of this near-eponymous band, is a wee sprite from rural England who has been called the savior of rock and roll for most of the last decade. Finally, she seems willing to live up to the billing. On her latest album, "Stories from the City, Stories from the Sea," the thirty-one-year-old brunette (who moved to New York early last year) cranks up the tempo

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM



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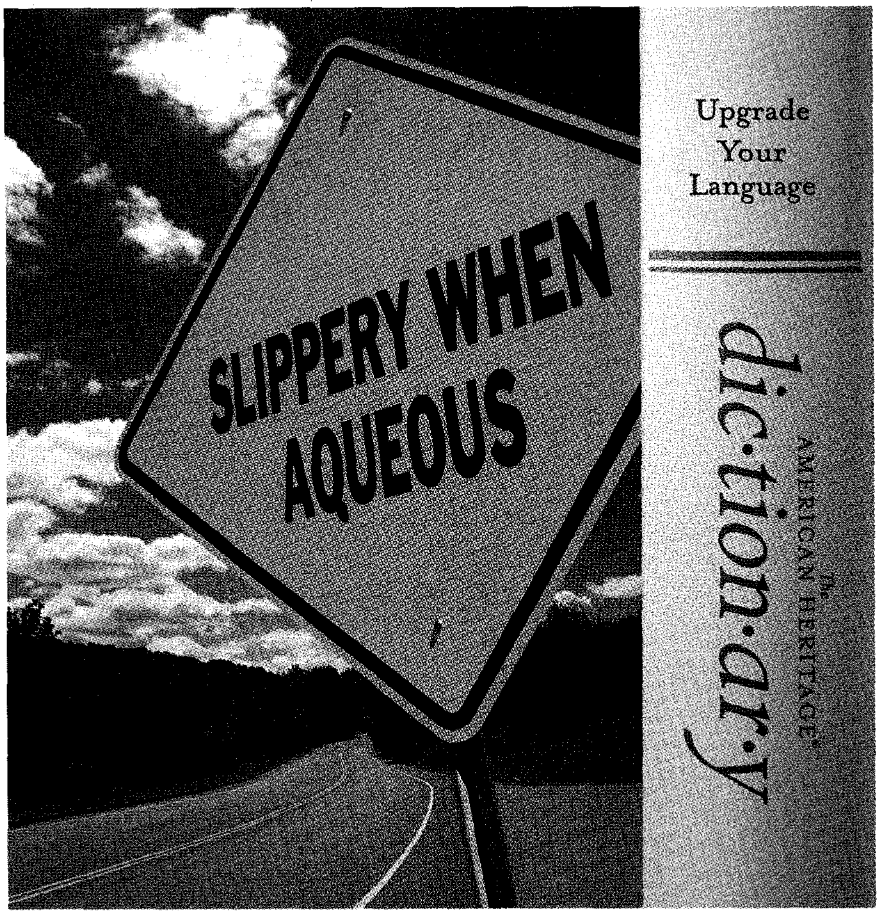

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FEZ
380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—Dec. 11-12: The Old 97's front man **Rhett Miller.** The **Mingus Big Band** goes on packing them in every Thursday. Dining.

GALAPAGOS
70 N. 6th St., Williamsburg (718-782-5188)—Dec. 12: **Stephen Buchanan** (see Concerts).

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Dec. 8: **St Germain,** the nom de performance of the reclusive French d.j. Ludovic Navarre, whose 1995 début, "Boulevard," paved the way for Air and other Continental electronic acts. His follow-up disk, "Tourist," relies heavily on jazz influences and live instrumentation (flutes, trumpet) to stir up a quiet storm. ♦ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the Society, call 696-9737.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—Dec. 8-10: **Darlene Love,** whose voice was one of the birth cries of rock and roll (her Phil Spector-produced hits include "He's a Rebel" and "He's Sure the Boy I Love"), and who's backed everyone from Sam Cooke and Elvis Presley to Cher, spreads a little seasonal cheer with a holiday show.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Dec. 8-9: The Windy City outfit **Mighty Blue Kings** settles in with original hard-swinging jump blues and favors songs by Louis Jordan and Jimmie Lunceford. Be sure to come early for the **Howard Fishman** quartet. The guitarist and singer Fishman haunts such diverse locales as the Oak Room, Sardi's, and the L-train platform in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. And his sound follows suit: while not exactly Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli reincarnated, Fishman and his violinist, Russell Farhang (along with a bassist and a cornettist), spin out the freshest small-group swing in the city. Dec. 10: If Hank Williams had been born in Israel, had come of age in the post-punk era, and had hung out with the art-school crowd, he might have turned out a bit like Eef Barzelay, the lanky front man of the quartet **Clem Snide.** Barzelay's screen-porch ballads and lilting, whimsical waltzes are haunted by images of Dairy Queens and bus trips into the unknown, and the band, with its earthy emphasis on cello and upright bass, gives them just the right amount of hopeful melancholy.

VILLAGE UNDERGROUND
130 W. 3rd St. (777-7745)—Dec. 6: Back in the early sixties, when Peter, Paul, and Mary were earnestly blowing in the wind, **Geoff Muldaur,** who sang lead vocals for the Jim Kweskin Jug Band, was leavening to the folk revival that was then sweeping the country. Muldaur and his cohorts mined the blues, jazz, and, yes, folk tunes of the past, but they did it with a healthy sense of humor. Decades of writing for television shows and movies haven't diminished Muldaur's talents—his latest disk, "Password," is a timeless collection of new songs and covers, some of which date back to the nineteen-twenties.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BAM CAFÉ
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4139)—Dec. 7: Two players who share a sly, delightfully skewed way with musical idioms, the accordionist **Guy Klucevsek** and the saxophonist **Phillip Johnston,** are world-class instrumentalists and, seemingly, natural partners.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Dec. 10: The **Elvin Jones Jazz Machine.** Jones is seventy-three? Somebody produce a birth certificate, because this whirlwind of a drummer is still playing with the energy and imagination of a twenty-five-year-old. Jones should be experienced not merely as a miracle of nature but as the brilliant jazz innovator that he continues to be.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through Dec. 31, **Bobby Short.** ♦ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **Barbara Carroll** is in attendance through Dec. 30.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (339-4095)—Dec. 6-30: The pianist and vocalist **Michael Feinstein** closes out the millennium, or the year, if you're one of those.

IRIDIUM
48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Dec. 10: **Grand Slam,** an ad-hoc jazz supergroup that actually lives up to its combined potential. The guitarist **Jim Hall,** the saxophonist **Joe Lovano,** the bassist **George Mraz,** and the drummer **Lewis Nash** cover the bop-to-free-jazz terrain with ease

TABLES FOR TWO

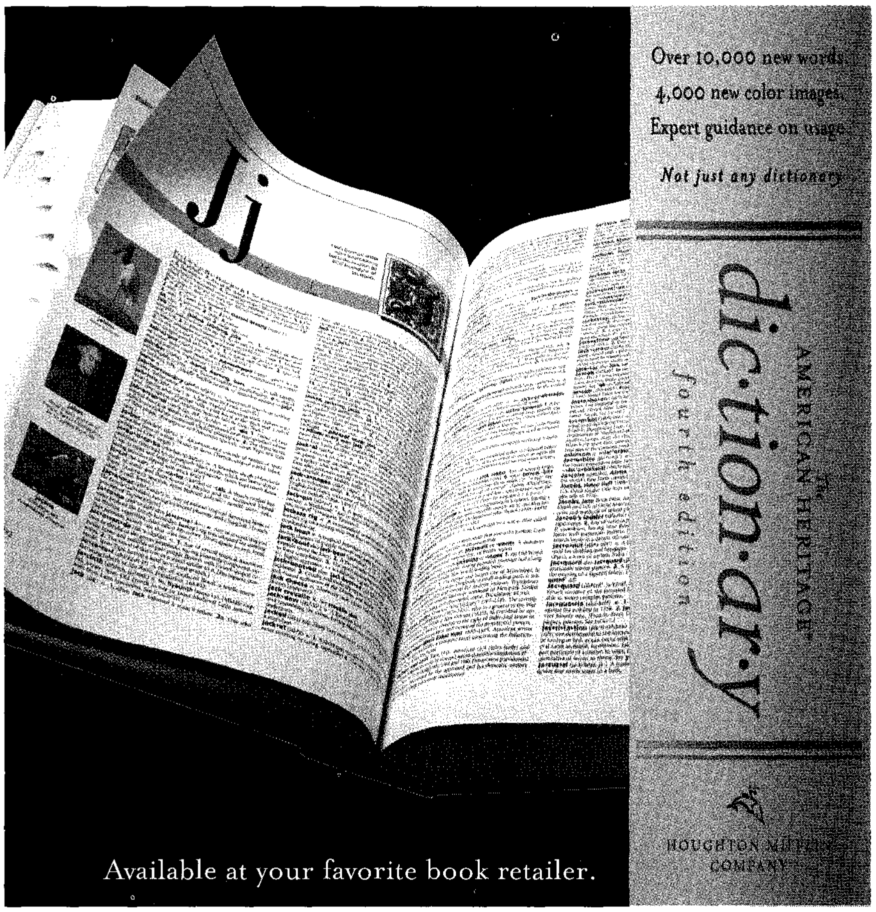
BAYARD'S
1 Hanover Sq. (514-9454)—On most nights, a clutch of town cars idles in front of New York's former Cotton Exchange, an 1851 Italianate palazzo in the financial district. And yet there's no action on the stoop, no one examining the S.S. Leviathan's brass bell in the vestibule. Word has never really got out about the two-year-old restaurant hidden in what is now India House, a private club whose kitchen fixes sandwiches at midday for its shipping-magnate members and is open to the public at suppertime.

The newcomers have restored the building's interior to its nautical glory and removed layers of paint from the grand mahogany-and-brass double staircase, which is flanked by cannons and crowned with a racy clipper-ship figurehead. Although a few diners are always seated near the fireplace at the far end of the stately second-floor dining room, it can get pretty lonely in here. The arrival of a new chef—Eberhard Müller, who succeeded André Soltner at Lutèce and was earlier at Maguy LeCoze's fish palace, Le Bernardin—should turn things around.

Müller doesn't fool around with his seafood appetizers: Fisher Island oysters with ossetra caviar come in a champagne cream sauce—a dish straight out of the Gilded Age. And don't let the modern mango-and-lobster salad scare you; he wouldn't do anything unsavory to the fresh crustaceans from Maine. The kitchen's biggest adventure is a snapper tartare with golden raisins and *verjus*, but it comes across like a classic. Müller's masterly sauces and broths make the entrées seem effortless: roasted monkfish with bacon, pearl onions, and a mushroom broth; a New York strip steak with a Bordelaise sauce. The menu entries are followed by laconic descriptions, often just mentioning vegetables that Müller has grown at his Long Island farm. The fish course, however, has some luxurious flourishes: Calvados soufflé, saffron parfait, champagne sorbet.

The owner is Peter Poulakakos; his father, Harry (of Harry's at Hanover Square, downstairs), has been stockpiling epic Bordeaux and rare Eisweins for almost thirty years, and they're available here. Harry is known for fair pricing, so this high-end list is worth a splurge. Raymond Buckler, the restaurant's affable general manager, has been boning up on the intricacies of man-of-war riggings by reading Patrick O'Brian novels, and he'll lead impromptu after-dinner tours through the rambling rooms and their salty artifacts. Only the view across narrow Stone Street, into a sprawling officescape full of lifeless cubicles, breaks the historic mood. (Open Mondays through Saturdays, for dinner only. Entrées $28-$38.)

—*Owen Phillips*



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and no small amount of smarts. Hall is experiencing a late-career creative surge, Lovano's in full bloom, and Nash and Mraz long ago transformed rhythmic support into an art form. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Through Dec. 10: **Randy Weston** and the African Rhythms Sextet. The pianist Weston has steeped himself in the music of North Africa, but there's still plenty of Brooklyn bop left in his piano. Combining the sharp edges of Thelonious Monk, the fragrant harmony of Duke Ellington, and the nasty rhythm of Bud Powell, he has a musical personality as urban as the M.T.A. His African leanings come out in the expansiveness and the deep, soulful groove that permeate the proceedings. Dining.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Dec. 7: The **Clark Terry** quintet. Dec. 8-10: The **Roy Hargrove** quintet. Trumpeter Hargrove is feisty, historically aware, and blessed with a brassy, ringing tone, but his defining quality may be his sheer enthusiasm. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

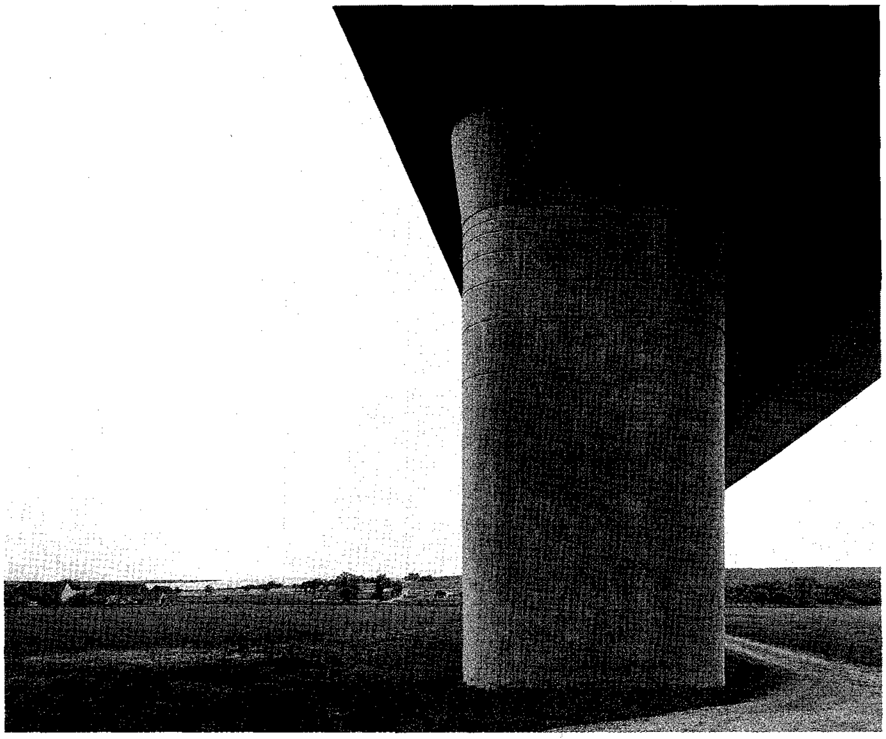
ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—**"The Still-Lifes of Evaristo Baschenis: The Music of Silence"** presents eighteen paintings by the seventeenth-century Northern Italian artist. Through March 4. ♦ **"The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliot Collection,"** billed as the most comprehensive exhibition ever assembled in the West, features more than a hundred examples of the graceful form. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"The Year One: Art of the Ancient World East and West,"** a selection of antiquities from the permanent collection, all of which were created around 1 A.D. Through Jan. 14. ♦ **"Art and the Empire City"** presents paintings, photographs, and decorative art popular in New York between the completion of the Erie Canal, in 1825, and the beginning of the Civil War, in 1861. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"The Golden Deer of Eurasia: Scythian and Sarmatian Treasures from the Russian Steppes."** Through Feb. 4. ♦ **"Rain of the Moon: Silver in Ancient Peru."** Through April 22. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—**"Open Ends,"** the third and final installment of **"MOMA 2000,"** the yearlong exhibition devoted to the art of the past century, covers works from 1960 to the present. Through Jan. 2. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—With Wright presiding and Armani in residence, it doesn't seem as if there would be room for another artist at the Guggenheim, but Robert Wilson's design for the Giorgio Armani retrospective makes the avant-garde director look indispensable. The show's first room, on the top floor, houses items from Armani's spring 2000 line, which seems to detour into Versace's terrain, and is as hard to take as those fluorescent clothes. Six floors of the rotunda redeem it. Wilson has blocked the ramps off from the atrium with scrims of carefully tailored cream-colored cotton which marry Wright's curves and Armani's material. Against this backdrop, ghostly groups of disembodied clothes, curves spookily filled out, spaghetti straps held up by stitched-on wire, are perfectly draped and lit, and arranged by their influence and style. Armani's designs and his "non-color palette," of black, white, and every neutral in between, are so agreeably elegant and comfortable that it's tempting to check the museum shop for a seamstress. Through Jan. 17. ♦ **"Amazons of the Avant-Garde"** features works from six women—Alexandra Exter, Natalia Goncharova, Liubov Popova, Olga Rozanova, Varvara Stepanova, and Nadezhda Udaltsova—who made impressive contributions to Russian branches of experimental art in the early twentieth century. Through Jan. 7. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—A retrospective devoted to the work of Sol LeWitt, the Tom Sawyerish Conceptualist who gets assistants to execute his ideas, includes a zigguratlike sculpture, wall paintings, books, works on paper, and photographs. Opens Dec. 7. ♦ Edward Steichen began as a pictorialist, photographing the sweet and fuzzy scenes fashionable in the first decades of the twentieth century—it's tough to tell the early prints in this retrospective from his smudgy pastel paintings of the same era. Later, he began experimenting with sharper focus and stronger lines, turning still-lifes of vegetables into stark modernist abstractions, and he came to see photography as a way to make a strong and immediate impression. Not coincidentally, his commercial work for magazines and advertisements became highly salable. Steichen's celebrity portraits—of Garbo and Dietrich for *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*—still look contemporary. When he gave up such work, famous and financially secure but estranged from many of the noncommercial artists he'd known in the past, he took over the direction of MOMA's nascent photography department. Even there, he couldn't shake his popular touch: his blockbuster overview of the medium, "The Family of Man," which is nicely documented here, travelled for ten years and sold millions of catalogues. Through Feb. 4. ♦ **"Roni Horn: Still Water (The River Thames, for Example), 1999."** Through Jan. 14. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)



Hans-Christian Schink's Autobahn landscapes, at Goethe Institute (see Photography).

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—**"Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga."** The Viking age lasted some three hundred years—from 750 to 1050 A.D.—but its cultural legacy is far-reaching, as both football fans and opera buffs will attest. (And, were it not for the Vikings, we might have a four-day week; the words "Wednesday," "Thursday," and "Friday" all derive from Norse.) To commemorate the thousandth anniversary of Leif Eriksson's landing on American shores, the museum sets out to demonstrate that there was more to Norsemen than pillage and plunder (and to teach us, ahem, that they never actually wore horned helmets). Archeological artifacts range from manuscripts through human remains (there's evidence of Christian burial practices) to a whalebone slab used as an ironing board (a Viking invention). The show's centerpiece is a three-quarter-scale, forty-foot-long model of a merchant ship, but its hidden treasure is a selection of nine of the Lewis chessmen, figures made of walrus ivory, each carved with a unique expression, unearthed on a beach in Greenland in 1831. Through Jan. 21. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—A retrospective devoted to Lee Krasner ends its national tour in the artist's birthplace. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Hip-Hop Nation: Roots, Rhymes, and Rage"** presents videos, clothing and accessories, manuscripts of lyrics, F.B.I. letters, magazine covers, and installations that catalogue reactions to the genre. Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"Gold of the Nomads: Scythian Treasures from Ancient Ukraine."** Through Jan. 21. ♦ **"Nardo di Cione: The Reuniting of an Altarpiece."** Through Feb. 18. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—The first American retrospective of John Wesley, an artist who was pigeonholed as Pop in the early sixties but has long since been redefined as undefinable. Donald Judd, a close friend and champion of Wesley's work, once deemed it "humorous and goofy" (that was a compliment). As this show demonstrates, the artist's unique style has wavered little over the past forty years. The basic elements recur—superflat perspective (Minoan pottery meets comic strip), a peculiar palette (fleshy pinks and chalky blues), and a surreal cast of characters (a menagerie in cahoots with sportsmen, Dagwood, and naked ladies). Each image is stripped down to its essentials, as much emblem as picture. The results are at once anachronistic and timeless. Through Jan. 15. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

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GALLERIES-UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

MARY CASSATT
A lovely show of more than two hundred previously undiscovered prints and drawings by the only American formally invited to join the Impressionists. Cassatt's primary subject was mothers and children, and her best work is tender without being mawkish. As if to encourage viewers to consider Cassatt in a fresh light, the show opens not with these familiar domestic scenes but with a shadow world—a series of soft-ground etchings portraying dimly lit, solitary figures reading or attending the opera. Cassatt's gifts as a printer were exquisite, and the show offers a rare opportunity to compare several states of the same image, as a green dress in "Gathering Fruit," for example, shifts from turquoise in one print to a delicate apple green in the next. Through Dec. 22. (Adelson, 25 E. 77th St. 439-6800.)

ENRIQUE MARTINEZ CELAYA
This Cuban-born Californian's paintings seem almost Teutonic in their dreamy romanticism. Most depict a pale nude youth, a sort of latter-day Young Werther, who wanders through moonlit birch forests or wades into dark waters in the rain. Is this, one wonders, what the catalogue essay means by "the estrangement of visibility from the sensible"? Only the spare elegance of Martinez Celaya's images, painted on swaths of black velvet, staves off their rendezvous with bathos. Through Dec. 22. (Galería Ramis Barquet, 41 E. 57th St. 644-9090.)

GEORGE TOOKER / BEN SHAHN
Since his conversion to Roman Catholicism, in 1976, Tooker's work has become increasingly sacramental. Gone are the paranoid subway scenes of the fifties, with their trenchcoated lurkers. Tooker now paints closeups of handsome youthful figures, often nude, asleep, or cradling infants. One of the most striking pictures depicts Tooker himself, a sable brush in his hand, being patted on the head by a benign, hunky angel. Rendered in a style that descends from Fra Angelico's, Tooker's icons of homoerotic piety have a rare and lovably mild innocence. / Small ink drawings, in Shahn's blotchy, barbed-wire line, of strikers, Fascists, and politicians. It's a surprise to find, among the last, a rather sweetly pensive version of Joseph McCarthy. Both shows through Dec. 29. (DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 247-2111.)

CY TWOMBLY
A triumphant procession of canvases—"one painting in ten parts"—by a master of cryptic lyricism. Inspired by an Egyptian Pharaoh and titled "Coronation of Sesostris," the cycle opens with a scrawled pictograph of a blood-red sun on a white ground and culminates in a barge shape carrying stick figures that could be flowers, flags, or oarsmen. The mood shifts from tranquil to majestic to elegiac as Twombly dabbles with a palette of crimson, purple, and yellow. Some canvases are punctuated by the artist's characteristically illegible script; others are shrouded in veils of color as translucent as mist. Through Jan. 26. (Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 744-2313.)

Short List

SUE COE
Galerie St. Étienne, 24 W. 57th St.
245-6734. Through Jan. 6.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN
Lawrence Rubin Greenberg
Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.
445-0444. Through Dec. 9.

MARK MAHOSKY
Rickards, 1045 Madison Ave., at 79th St.
924-0858. Through Dec. 20.

JOAN MIRÓ
Salander-O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St.
879-6606. Through Jan. 6.

JILL MOSER
Ganz, 25 E. 73rd St. 535-1977.
Through Dec. 14.

GEORGE NICK
Fischbach, 24 W. 57th St. 759-2345.
Through Dec. 23.

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

DAMIEN HIRST
The Brit-pack gang leader's last New York show was decidedly underwhelming; Hirst has clearly decided not to let that happen again. Everything about this exhibition is determinedly spectacular, from its square footage to its gargantuan budget and run-on title: "Theories, Models, Methods, Approaches, Assumptions, Results, and Findings." The outcome is a cross between a science museum, a morgue, and a slasher-movie set. The artist has filled eleven vitrines with skeletons, medical instruments, tropical fish, laboratory dioramas, and, as a leitmotiv, Ping-Pong balls levitating on electric blowers—Hirst's symbol for the randomness, or perhaps the fragility, of life. Towering above it all is "Hymn," a twenty-foot bronze enlargement of an anatomical model, with cheerfully polychromed entrails. Few of the show's individual components carry much metaphorical weight, but there remains something fundamentally pleasing about the spectacle of a simple obsession so massively indulged ("I just want to find out about rotting," Hirst has said). Through Dec. 16. (Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 741-1111.)

SUE WILLIAMS
Williams, once just about the angriest woman in the art world, has now completed her decade-long metamorphosis into a sort of blissed-out innocent. Her new paintings are pure aerobic abstractions, with big loops and scribbles of red, yellow, and blue on white grounds. Splashes and drips are kept to a minimum; so is any kind of design impulse. The results have an utterly limber, volatile grace, like an ice-skater doing warmup exercises or a graffiti artist loosening his arm. De Kooning, at the end of his life, became the Fred Astaire of this kind of kinesthetic calligraphy; Williams could almost be his Ginger Rogers. Through Dec. 16. (303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121.)

Short List

POLLY APFELBAUM
D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St.
352-9460. Through Dec. 23.

SO HYUN BAE
Skoto, 529 W. 20th St. 352-8058.
Through Dec. 9.

BROOKIE MAXWELL
Gallery 138, at 138 W. 17th St. 633-0703.
Through Dec. 14.

GALLERIES-DOWNTOWN

ANDREW FORGE
A near-comically gaunt and gracious Englishman, Forge is best known as a teacher and a writer (of lavish, discerning books on Monet and Degas). Lately, his own paintings have been getting some deserved attention. To call them Pointillist landscapes doesn't quite capture their methodical oddness. It's true that their scattered touches of bright color generally coalesce, at a distance, into recognizable images—a row of saplings, for example, or a huge, backlit tree trunk. Rather than reprising Seurat, however, Forge's works seem like a sort of rural Op art, full of polychromatic flickerings that quietly tantalize the eye. Through Jan 6. (Studio School, 8 W. 8th St. 673-6466.)

"COLLECTOR'S CHOICE"
Exit Art sent eight collectors on an imaginary shopping spree for contemporary art, with a budget of fifty thousand dollars per patron (at times interpreted with irrational exuberance: one

of the theoretical budgets exceeds two hundred and fifty thousand). The only selection with a clear focus—six photographs by established artists, including Gregory Crewdson and Hiroshi Sugimoto—is also the most predictable. The rest of the shows within the show career from medium to medium at a breakneck pace, conveying the thrill of betting on artists early in the game. If the jam-packed proceedings put you at risk of Stendahl syndrome (where you pass out from aesthetic overload, as the novelist did in Venice), slip into Leo Villareal's "Particle Chamber," where a hypnotic video projection of floating matter offers all the benefits of an isolation tank without the isolation. Through Jan. 6. (Exit Art, 548 Broadway. 966-7745.)

"FIGURE IN THE LANDSCAPE"
This group show is a concise meditation on the turning points between representation and abstraction. The heart of the show is a late canvas by Philip Guston; its meat-slab reds and clear-sky blues exude an authority that's nearly matched by every work on view. Guston's brand of cartoon-inflected bravura, peculiarly American, is best reflected in the work of Carroll Dunham, who shares the late painter's deceptive simplicity and subversive humor. Dunham's "Orange Glove" opens the show with a hotheaded thug (think Guston's hooded toughs) in a palette so hot it threatens to burst into flames. Through Jan. 13. (Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St. 695-0753.)

Short List

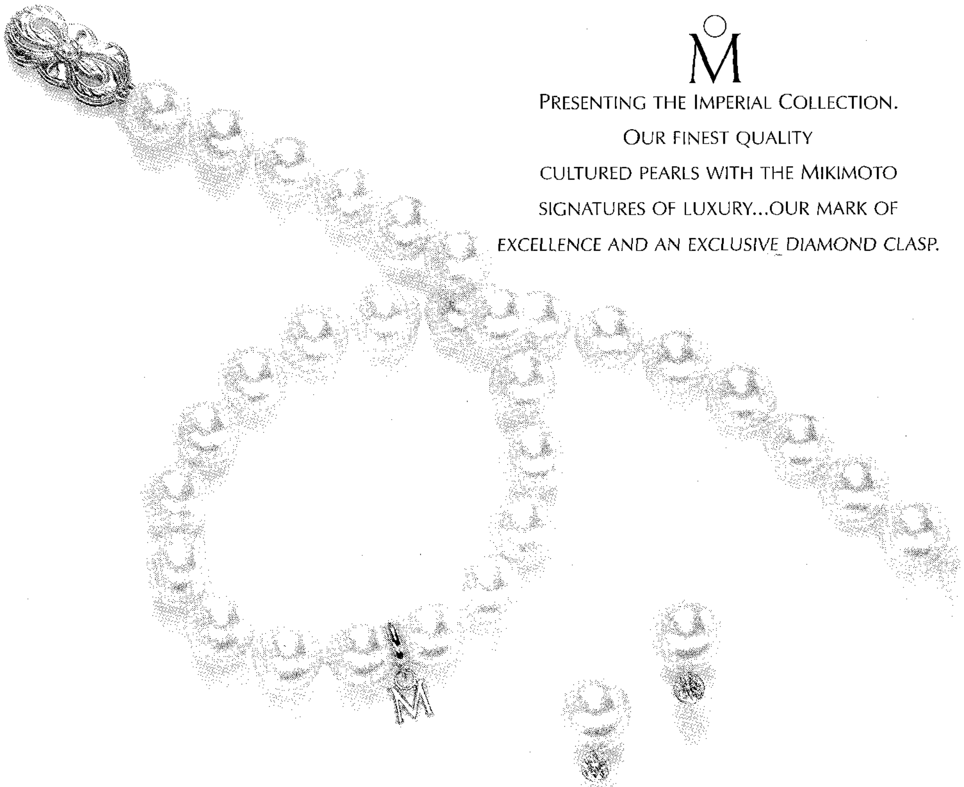
NANCY BALLIETT
Atlantic, 40 Wooster St. 219-3183.
Through Dec. 16.

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG
Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St. 431-9224.
Through Dec. 23.

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

"MENTAL WILDERNESS"
Gale Gates's third "Emerging Curators" show boasts support from the Andy Warhol Foundation and Toshiba—which might've been more shocking last year, before Dumbo had a grocery store; now it's a neighborhood like any other, with shows like any other's. Viewers are met by a suicidal green worm, hanging itself from a bedsheet noose, by Paul Wenbeck, followed by a carved-polystyrene volcano. From those dark imagined panoramas, the show ascends, up a ramp full of slightly altered vacation snapshots, to lighter, heavenly scenes. For those whose idea of paradise is doing nothing, Karen Apollonia Miller's photograph of an empty beach blanket will be the high point. For those who envision heaven as a fairway, Daniel Jackson's "Eighteen in One" should do it: the artist has digitally animated a golf ball arcing onto a hilly green, bouncing lightly, rolling perilously, then rattling into the cup, over and over, in hole after hole. Through Dec. 16. (Gale Gates et al., 37 Main St. 718-522-4596.)

"SUPERPREDATORS"
This show takes its name from the 1997 Massive Attack song, which, in turn, was made up largely of Siouxsie and the Banshees samples; according to the curators, such liberal borrowing "conflates private and public," but the big lenders here appear to be established Manhattan galleries. The curators have Leo Koenig to thank for Lisa Ruyter's acrylic "Bianca O'Blivion," and Andrea Rosen for Rita Ackermann's death-rock painting "Cat Scratch Fever," which features several young women in Kiss makeup. Greene Naftali lent a lush Daniela Rossell interior, photographed from above, through a chandelier. Lawrence Rubin Greenberg Van Doren sent over two Jessica Craig-Martin C-prints of benefit parties, one of them showing a pair of celebrants whose party heels and fishnets are seen beneath a bathroom stall—the cleverest conflation yet of public and private. Through Dec. 11. (CRP, 100 Water St. 718-858-1373.)



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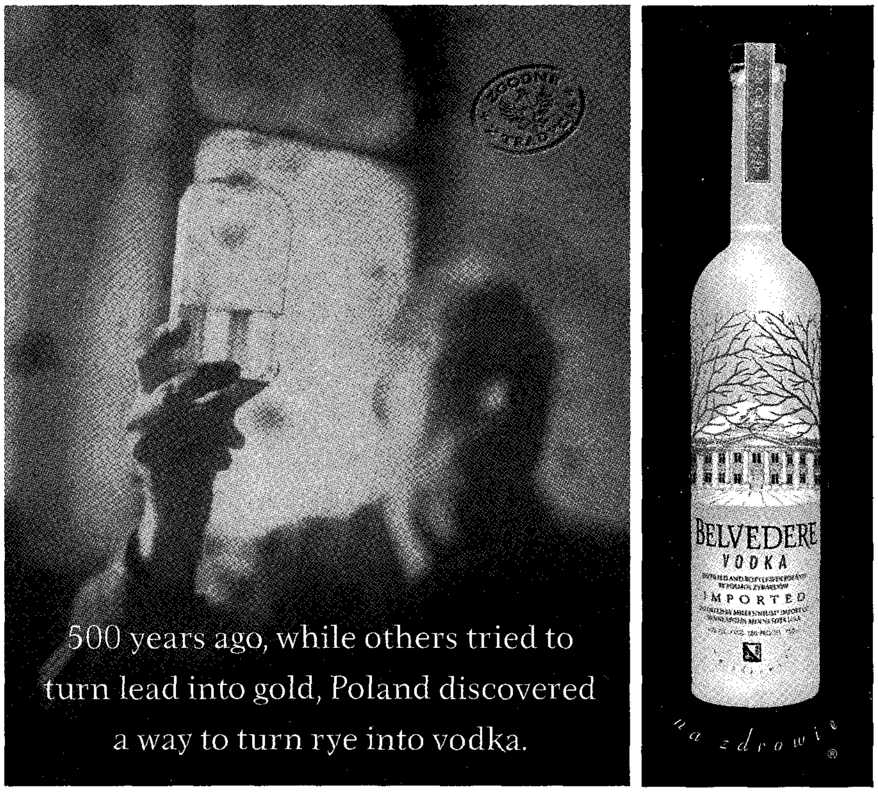
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AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S
Dec. 6-7: A wide range of jewelry, including a red-tourmaline-and-diamond brooch given by King Edward VII to his mistress, Alice Keppel. ♦ Dec. 8: Egyptian, classical, and Near Eastern antiquities, jewelry, and decorative objects. ♦ Dec. 9: Robots and antique toys from the eighteen-sixties to the present day, from the collection of F. H. Griffith, including a very rare Japanese Mego Man, circa 1955. ♦ Dec. 12: Judaica and manuscripts, including a notable Viennese Passover Haggadah from 1730. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

CHRISTIE'S
Dec. 6 at 2: A wide range of jewelry, much of it wearable, and seals, dating from 3000 B.C. to 1000 A.D. ♦ Dec. 7 at 10 A.M. and 2: Antiquities from ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome. ♦ Dec. 8 at 10 A.M.: Twentieth-century design from America and Europe, including works by Josef Hoffmann and Gustav Stickley. ♦ Dec. 8 at 2: Decorative art and objects from the Tiffany studios. ♦ Dec. 11 at 2 and Dec. 12 at 10 A.M.: Coins and paper money. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.)

ANTIQUORUM
Dec. 6: Pocket watches, wristwatches, and clocks from the eighteenth century to the present day. ♦ Dec. 7: Jewelry and gemstones. The star lot is the Carolina Queen, certified as the largest emerald ever found in North America. (Grand Havana Room, 666 Fifth Ave., at 53rd St. 750-1103.)

DOYLE
Dec. 6: Fine jewelry, watches, and objects of virtu. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730.)

PHILLIPS
Dec. 10: Fine jewelry and a range of rare perfume bottles, including work by Lalique and Baccarat. (406 E. 79th St. 570-4830.)

SWANN
Dec. 7: Books on art and architecture. ♦ Dec. 12: Photographs, cameras, and photographic literature, including images by Edward S. Curtis and Fred Plaut and prints from early-twentieth-century Russia. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710.) ♦ Note: On Dec. 6, the gallery hosts the fourth annual photography auction of Friends of Friends, to benefit the Angkor Hospital for Children. (For information, call 691-0909.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

WENDY EWALD
Loaded, romanticized photographs of children have grabbed the art world's spotlight lately, while Ewald's more dignified pictures languish. "An African American Alphabet," like most of her projects, was made in collaboration with kids—in this case, a group of Cleveland middle-school students. They chose a word or phrase for each letter, posed to illustrate it, then painted and scratched capital and lowercase letters and the words themselves onto each image's negative. A small boy with a bigger child's elbow resting lightly on his shoulder embodies "brother," while a girl showing viewers the back of her unbrushed head defines "nappy." Through Jan. 30. (Scalo, 560 Broadway. 334-9393.)

SIMPSON KALISHER
Like Walker Evans, this mid-century American street photographer fuses the city's passing configurations of subjects into lasting images. One picture shows a hat-wearing, cigar-puffing New Yorker exhaling a wisp of smoke that billows into a huge white cloud and fills half the frame. The print appears to document miraculous lung capacity but in fact demonstrates Kalisher's skill and humor—he caught the man's smoky breath as it overlapped with a stream of steam rising from a manhole. Through Dec. 23. (De Lellis, 47 E. 68th St. 327-1482.)

HANS-CHRISTIAN SCHINK
Schink's large-format color pictures document one recent by-product of German reunification: the

ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Dangling Modifiers

After decades of dedicating themselves almost exclusively to variations on Santas, snowmen, and shiny balls, ornament makers have lately embraced rather more ambitious subjects. These days, a visit to the Christmas department is as likely to turn up miniature foodstuffs and flying squirrels as sugarplum fairies.

At **ABC CARPET & HOME** (888 Broadway; 473-3000), a store whose flat name offers no hint of the wonders within, the holiday department is so crowded that ornaments hang from the rafters. The insouciant designs include chartreuse teapots ($10), beaded mermaids ($20), carrots ($12), dill pickles ($12), and miniature watermelon slices ($14)—plus a trio of grinning ants ($24), caterpillars ($30), and octopuses ($22) straight out of a nineteen-thirties Warner Bros. cartoon. A young lady in a fur-and-feather-trimmed dress pirouettes on a single icicle that has replaced her legs ($24), and Santa shows up hugging a fellow with floppy ears who is wearing purple overalls and is a dead ringer for the Easter bunny ($23).

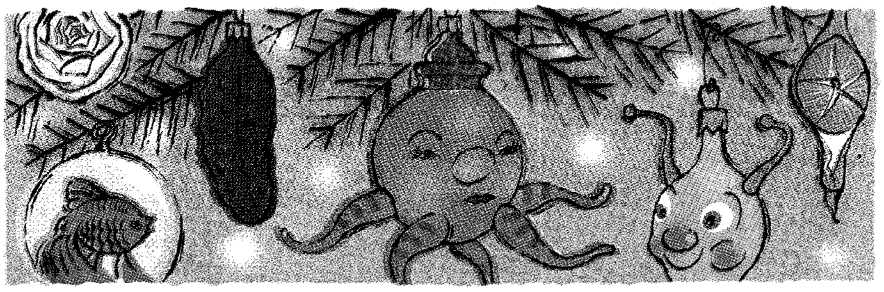
MATT MCGHEE (22 Christopher St.; 741-3138), a small shop located in a former stable in the West Village, offers breathtaking glass versions of morning glories ($120), cabbage roses ($140), Annunciation lilies ($140), cattleya orchids ($160), and other flora in shades realistic and fanciful. Eight-inch-high court jesters have been painted in offbeat colors specially commissioned by the store ($80); similarly imposing Santas turn up in hues like aubergine and lime ($34). Among the ornaments created and signed by Mr. McGhee himself is a spectacular glass globe that, thanks to trompe-l'oeil enamelling, seems to contain a floating goldfish ($140).

The survivors of Christmases past at **PAULA RUBENSTEIN** (65 Prince St.; 966-8954) aren't limited to genuine antiques, though the store has unearthed several nineteenth-century German *Kugeln*, or glass globes, that have charming if gently eroded patinas ($225 to $325). Twelve glitter-dusted pinecones of more recent vintage, still in their original box—it reads "Made in Occupied Japan"—are $125 for the set; the heady, and highly collectible, nineteen-sixties are represented by a mint-in-box set of four spiralling fluorescent Chinese-lantern-like objects suitable for trees too cool for angels and snowmen ($45).

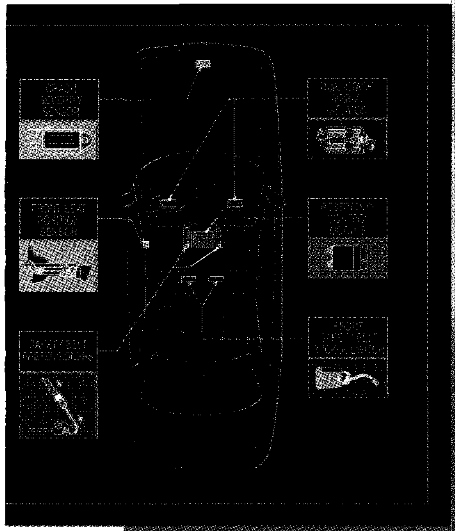
Uptown, the swanky gift shop at the **ASIA SOCIETY** (502 Park Ave.; 288-6400) has a range of surprisingly low-priced ornaments from the East: vividly painted wooden birds from Sri Lanka are $7; tiny puffed-fabric hearts made by the Hmong tribe of Thailand and decorated with stitching that recalls nineteenth-century white work cost $3; and $10 buys a pink mirrored ball from India that could hang in a doll-house discothèque. Chinese cloisonné assumes a number of guises, including crimson-eyed bumblebees ($17), tropical fish ($10), hummingbirds ($16), and small bells with which to ring in the New Year (three sizes, ranging from $5 to $15).

The ornament buyer at the **MORGAN LIBRARY** (29 E. 36th St.; 685-0008) describes the shop's huge glass spheres, swirled with curlicues reminiscent of cake icing, as "Venetian-school glass"; they were handblown in Florida by Italian expats ($35). Among the other offerings are musical and political figures, including Bach, Jefferson, Washington, and Ivan the Terrible ($30 to $50), any one of whom would lend an air of gravity amidst the caterpillars and the pickles.

—Lynn Yaeger



EDEL RODRIGUEZ



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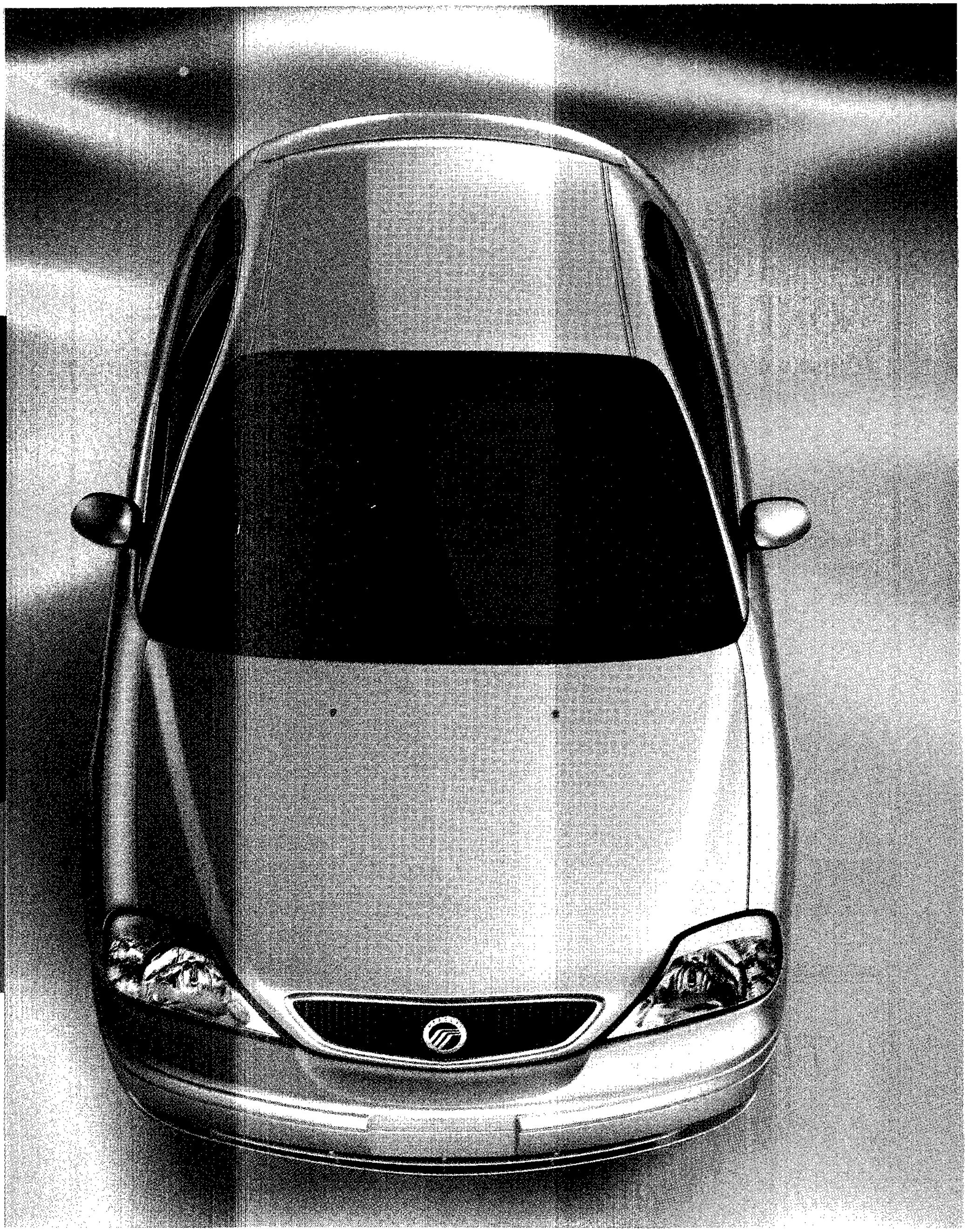

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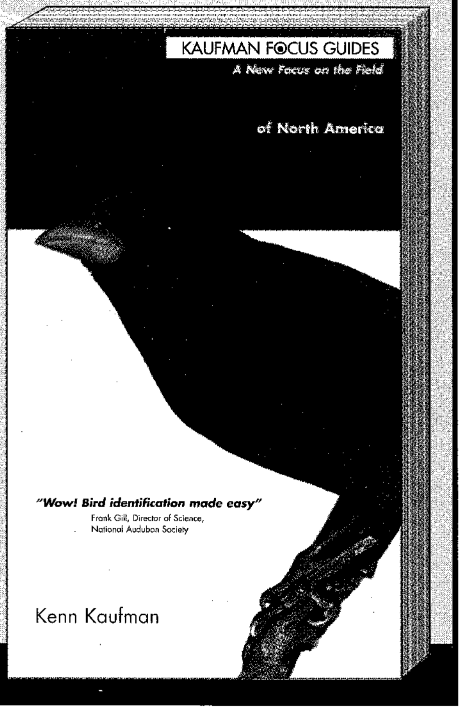
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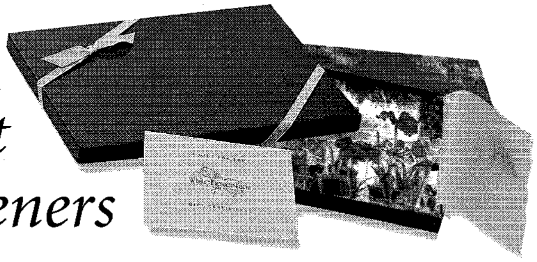

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development of a vast new highway network in the former East Germany. These latest Autobahns are intended to encourage the flow of industry and prosperity into the *neue Länder;* instead they create a new kind of no man's land. Schink, an unlikely heir to the nineteenth-century Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich, presents each concrete bridge and overpass as a breathtaking ruin, monumental and deserted in the dewy morning light. The roadside rest stop in "A 14 Rastplatz Plötzetal" speaks volumes as counterpart to verdant groves in the distance. Through Dec. 15. (Goethe Institute, 1014 Fifth Ave., at 83rd St. 439-8700.)

JOHN WATERS
For "Straight to Video," Waters (whom William Burroughs once called "the Pope of trash") splices together stills from Hollywood movies photographed directly from the TV screen. Taken out of context, the misdirected images form new B movies of their own, steeped in Waters' trademark bad taste. "Gore" storyboards bloody hearts and other organs; "Retard" offers a lineup of actors playing mentally disabled characters; "Toilet Training" depicts Hollywood stars emoting on the can. Best of all, "Farrah" presents an homage to the big hairdo, without which no John Waters project would be complete. Through Dec. 30. (American Fine Arts, 22 Wooster St. 941-0401.)

"PARTY PICTURES"
This show, subtitled "From Studio 54 to Cannes 2000," party-hops from Garry Winogrand's vintage black-and-white museum-party prints through Warhol's flash-blinded clubland to the current scene: Larry Fink's fashion-crowd chronicles and Jessica Craig-Martin's merciless charity-circuit exposés will make viewers want to get back in the time machine. But the vanity, misery, and overexposed cleavage that Craig-Martin records (alongside beauty, pleasure, and more flattering dress) are timeless—as is hope for a satisfying social life, as the artist pointed out recently. "Why do people go to parties? They're all bad. But people get dressed up—they go again and again. It's some kind of strange optimism." Through Jan. 6. (Lawrence Rubin Greenberg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave. 445-0444.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
I.C.P.'s redesigned midtown space hosts its inaugural round of shows: Annie Leibovitz's "Women," Lorie Novak's "Collected Visions," and a survey of the Center's large permanent collection called "Reflections in a Glass Eye." Uptown, "Eugène Atget: The Pioneer" continues. (Uptown: 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6. Midtown: 1166 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 860-1777. Open Mondays through Wednesdays, 10-5; Thursdays and Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

DANIEL AUBRY
Goldstrom, 560 Broadway. 941-9175.
Through Jan. 9.

CAROL BOVE
Keenan, 3 Crosby St. 431-5083.
Through Dec. 23.

STEPHANE COUTURIER
Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 397-3930.
Through Dec. 23.

LUCINDA DEVLIN
Rodgers, 529 W. 20th St. 414-9810.
Through Dec. 16.

JASON ODDY
Gallery 24, at 552 W. 24th St. 414-0370.
Through Jan. 13.

JACK PIERSON
Cheim & Reid, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727.
Through Jan. 6.

EDWARD STEICHEN
Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 966-6223.
Through Dec. 30.

See the museum listings for a photography exhibition at the Whitney Museum.

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
"Der Rosenkavalier," with Cheryl Studer, Susanne Mentzer, Elizabeth Norberg-Schulz, and Eric Halfvarson; Jiři Kout conducts. (Dec. 6 at 7:30 and Dec. 9 at 1.) ♦ The première performances of a new production of **"Il Trovatore,"** directed by Graham Vick, with Marina Mescheriakova, Dolora Zajick, Neil Shicoff, Roberto Frontali, and Dimitri Kavrakos; Carlo Rizzi. (Dec. 7 and Dec. 11 at 8.) ♦ **"Der Fliegende Holländer,"** with Sue Patchell, Roland Wagenführer, James Morris, and Peter Rose; Valery Gergiev. (Dec. 8 at 8.) ♦ **"La Bohème,"** with Nuccia Focile, Noëmi Nadelmann, Marcello Giordani, and Jean-Luc Chaignaud; Marco Armiliato. (Dec. 9 at 8.) ♦ The first performance this season of **"La Traviata,"** with Ruth Ann Swensen, Marcelo Alvarez, and Dwayne Croft; Jun Märkl. (Dec. 12 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

"THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES"
The Manhattan School of Music Opera Theatre presents the première of Scott Eyerly's opera, based on the novel by Hawthorne; David Gilbert. (Borden Auditorium, Broadway at 122nd St. 749-2802. Dec. 6 and Dec. 8 at 8 and Dec. 10 at 2:30.)

"OPERADIO"
New works by Kyle Gann ("Custer and Sitting Bull") and Phil Kline ("Into the Fire"), each a take-off on the form of the radio play. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 255-5793, ext. 11. Dec. 6-9 at 8.)

AMATO OPERA COMPANY
The company begins a twelve-performance run of **"La Bohème,"** the ideal wintertime opera. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 228-8200. Dec. 9 at 2:30 and Dec. 10 at 2:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

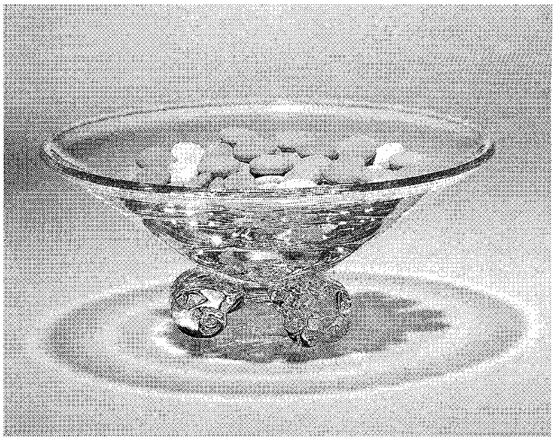
NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
In one of the more notable observations of the two-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of Bach's death, the orchestra will present the first three cantatas of the "Christmas Oratorio," with Ute Selbig, Annette Markert, Stanford Olsen, and Olaf Bär as the vocal soloists; Georg Christoph Biller, Bach's latest successor at the helm of Leipzig's St. Thomas Church Choir, will conduct, bringing his group along with him. (Dec. 6-9 at 8.) ♦ Bobby McFerrin directs Vivaldi's Concerto for Two Cellos, along with symphonies by Mozart (No. 29) and Prokofiev (the "Classical"). (Dec. 12 at 6:45.) ♦ For the holidays, Mr. McFerrin—a decent conductor, but a stupendous vocalist—will give one of his celebrated "one-man symphony" concerts. A more engaging family event would be hard to imagine. (Dec. 10 at 5.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030.)

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Seiji Ozawa leads the New York première of John Corigliano's Symphony No. 2, along with Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3 (with Krystian Zimerman). (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Dec. 6-7 at 8.)

THE TALLIS SCHOLARS
The renowned chamber choir presents a concert of Renaissance polyphony, including works by Sheppard, Tye, and Tallis. (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 800-627-0655. Dec. 7 at 8.)

NEW YORK YOUTH SYMPHONY
Mischa Santora leads performances of Strauss's "Ein Heldenleben," Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 (with Cecile Licad), and the world première of "Irrational Exuberance!" by Gabriel Ian Gould, the first of four new works by talented young composers to be presented this season. (Carnegie Hall. 581-5933, ext. 10. Dec. 10 at 2.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY
An evening of Mahler, Dvořák (the "Five Biblical Songs," with mezzo-soprano Desirée Halac), Glinka, and Ravel (the Piano Concerto, with Ruth Laredo). (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. 799-1259. Dec. 11 at 2 and 7 and Dec. 12 at 8.)



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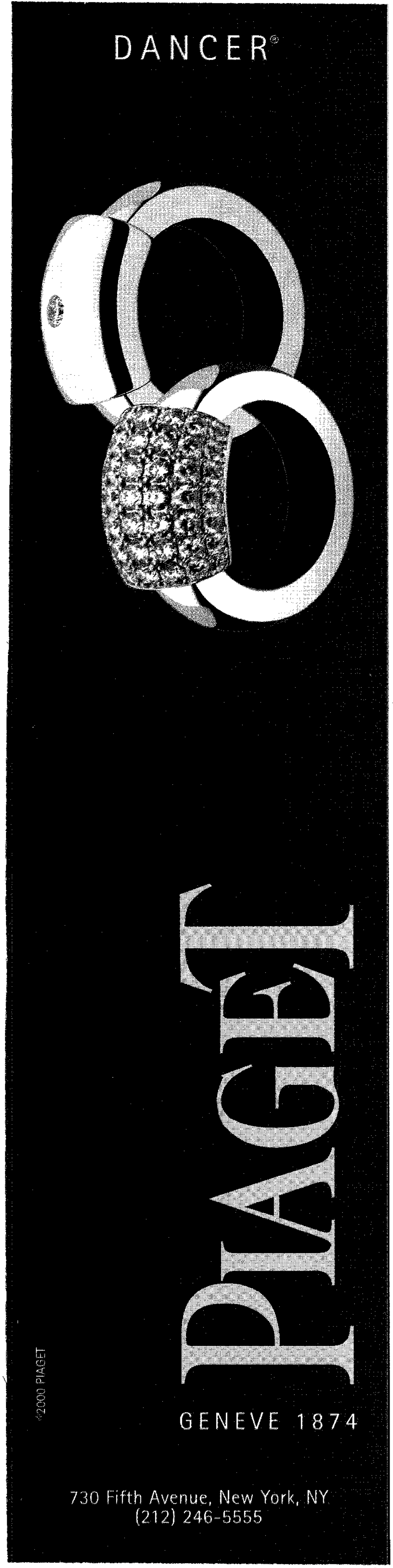


STAATSKAPELLE BERLIN
The orchestra begins a series of six Beethoven concerts, with Daniel Barenboim appearing as both conductor and pianist. Dec. 11 at 8: The Piano Concerto No. 1 and the Symphony No. 3 (the "Eroica"). ♦ Dec. 12 at 8: Symphonies Nos. 4 and 5, and the Piano Concerto No. 2. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800.)

RECITALS

GUARNERI STRING QUARTET
Under the auspices of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the eminent ensemble offers quartets by Mozart, Mendelssohn, and Ravel. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5788. Dec. 6 at 8.) ♦ At the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a program of Haydn, Shostakovich, and Beethoven. (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Dec. 9 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC
Dec. 7 and Dec. 8 at 7:30: An unusual program of Beethoven, Bach-Busoni, and the French nineteenth-century composer Alexis de Castillon, featuring the incisive American pianist Frederic Chiu. ♦ Dec. 9 at 7:30 and Dec. 10 at 4: Robert White, Paul Neubauer, and Margo Garrett present a wide range of songs for tenor, viola, and piano. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

ENSEMBLE FOR EARLY MUSIC
The group presents "A Renaissance Christmas," music from the court of Henry VIII. (Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 280-0330. Dec. 8 at 8 and Dec. 9 at 3 and 8.)

NEW AMSTERDAM BAROQUE
A concert that explores the relationships between song, speech, and instrumental music in works by Bach, Handel, and Telemann, given in the octagonal drawing room of the city's oldest remaining Colonial residence. (Morris-Jumel Mansion, 65 Jumel Terrace, between W. 160th and W. 162nd Sts. 923-8008. Dec. 9 at 2.)

PAUL GROVES / CHARLOTTE HELLEKANT
The tenor and the mezzo-soprano, husband and wife, sing a program of Chausson, Debussy, Duparc, Fauré, and Britten, with the pianist Steven Blier. (92nd St. Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Dec. 9 at 8.)

YO-YO MA / EMANUEL AX
The cellist and the pianist offer a program of Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn, and Corigliano. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. Dec. 11 at 7:30.)

PHILIPPE GRAFFIN
The French violinist, with the pianist Pascal Devoyon, makes his New York recital début in a program of Schumann, Debussy, Enesco, and Stravinsky. (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 228-0700. Dec. 10 at 5.)

BANG ON A CAN MARATHON
The annual, ultra-cool downtown-music event decamps to Brooklyn this year, featuring performances by over a hundred international musicians. (BAM Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Dec. 10 from 2 until 10.)

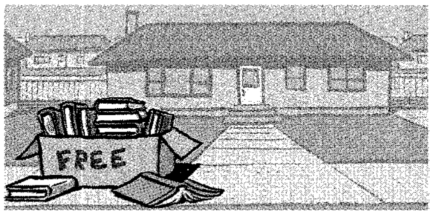
ABOVE AND BEYOND

READINGS
Dec. 7 at 6:30: By the historian Roy Porter, from his book about the role of the British in the Enlightenment, "The Creation of the Modern World." (Posman Books, 1 University Pl. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Dec. 8 at 7: By Breyten Breytenbach and Philip Schultz, from their poetry. (Eureka Joe's, 168 Fifth Ave., at 22nd St. Tickets at the door.)

TALK
Dec. 6 at 6:30: The critic Dave Hickey offers a lecture on what it's like to be an artist at the start of the twenty-first century. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. 229-5488.) ♦ Dec. 6 at 7: Gloria Steinem talks about the state of feminism today. (Graduate Center, City University of New York, Fifth Ave. at 34th St. For more information, call 817-8215.) ♦ Dec. 7 at 6: The biographer Patricia Bosworth joins Ann Douglas, a professor of English and comparative literature, for an evening centered on Bosworth's current subject, Marlon Brando. (Columbia University School of Journalism, Broadway at 116th St. No tickets necessary.)

BOOK CURRENTS

Burbs'-Eye View



This year, Americans will spend more money on fast food than on higher education. In **FAST FOOD NATION**, due out next month from Houghton Mifflin, Eric Schlosser shows how the fast-food industry conquered both appetite and landscape to become as American "as a small, rectangular, hand-held, frozen, and reheated apple pie." As Schlosser points out, the march of McDonald's, Burger King, and Taco Bell followed closely on the heels of suburban sprawl. A few other recent books find a surprisingly rich source of history and sociology, comedy and tragedy, among the cul-de-sacs and split-level Colonials.

Rosalyn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewen were urban snobs until their academic careers brought them to suburban Long Island. In **PICTURE WINDOWS** (Basic), they uncover a stormy history of suburbia, focussing on Levittown, where the developer William Levitt built and sold ranch homes like cars off an assembly line—and young families had kids by the bushel. Roosevelt Field, one of America's first malls, was built near Levittown on the site of Lindbergh's heroic transatlantic landing; playwright Eric Bogosian may have been thinking of Roosevelt Field in his first novel, **MALL** (Simon & Schuster), in which surreal violence erupts in the placid realm of J. C. Penney and Dunkin' Donuts.

The Harvard professor Robert D. Putnam, in **BOWLING ALONE** (Simon & Schuster), warns that "mall culture is not about overcoming isolation and connecting with others, but about privately surfing from store to store." Unlike the earlier suburbs, contemporary burbs—with their gated communities and longer commutes—squelch civic involvement. These days, there are more cars than drivers, and the typical suburbanite spends more time driving solo than at Tupperware parties or PTA meetings.

—Mark Rozzo

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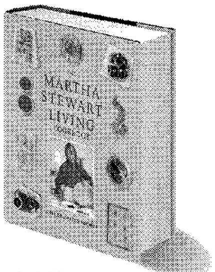

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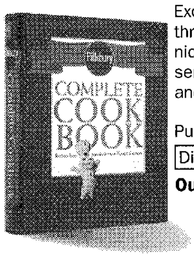

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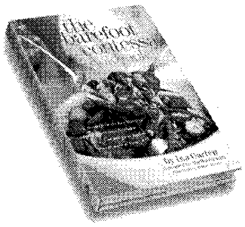

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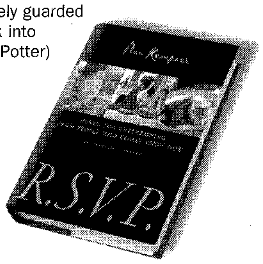
A lavish cookbook filled with mouthwatering menus and entertaining suggestions from two dozen of her favorite hosts and hostesses, Nan Kempner's *R.S.V.P.* brims with closely guarded recipes as it presents an exclusive peek into elegant ways of entertaining. (Clarkson/Potter)



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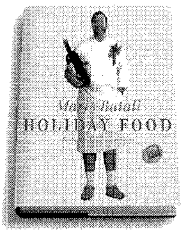

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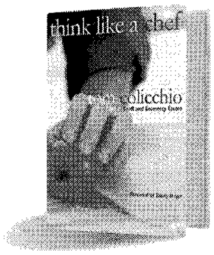

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MOVIES OPENING

THE ART OF AMÁLIA
A documentary about the Portuguese fado singer Amália Rodrigues, directed by Bruno de Almeida. In Portuguese. Opening Dec. 8. (Quad Cinema.)

CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 8.

THE DAY SILENCE DIED
The life of a small Bolivian village is disrupted by a stranger who arrives with radio equipment, in this drama directed by Paolo Agazzi. In Spanish. Opening Dec. 8. (Cinema Village.)

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS
A fantasy film based on the popular role-playing game, directed by Courtney Solomon. With Jeremy Irons, Thora Birch, and Marlon Wayans. Opening Dec. 8.

HILLBROW KIDS
Michael Hammon and Jacqueline Gorgen directed this documentary about street children in Johannesburg. Opening Dec. 6. (Film Forum.)

PROOF OF LIFE
A professional hostage negotiator (Russell Crowe) falls in love with the wife (Meg Ryan) of the man he's trying to free, in this action drama directed by Taylor Hackford. Opening Dec. 8.

SPRING FORWARD
A young ex-convict (Liev Schreiber) takes a job in the Parks Department of a small town, where he's mentored by an older man (Ned Beatty). Written and directed by Tom Gilroy. Opening Dec. 8.

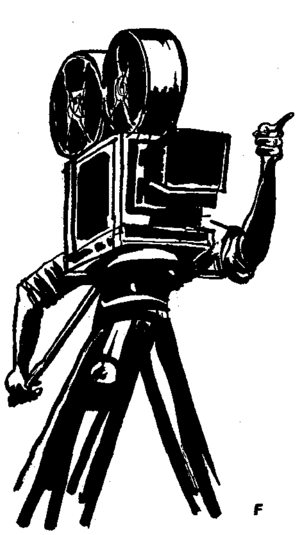
VERTICAL LIMIT
Martin Campbell directed this action picture about the rescue of a climbing party stranded on the slopes of K2. With Chris O'Donnell and Bill Paxton. Opening Dec. 8.

FILM NOTES

BEST IN SHOW
Christopher Guest reunites much of the cast of "Waiting for Guffman" for another mock documentary; the target this time around is the cloistered world of championship-dog breeding. Guest directs and scripts with a loose, improvisational style (no dialogue was written down), and while some of the scenes glide along with a quick-witted tempo, others are awkward. Best-in-group awards go to Parker Posey and Michael Hitchcock as an uptight suburban couple whose courtship involved adjacent Starbucks franchises, John Michael Higgins as a preening owner who outshines his Shih Tzu, and Fred Willard as a chipper commentator who showers asinine comments on the proceedings. If Guest has a trademark style, it's the airtight earnestness he demands of his cast—there's not one wink in the entire film.—*Michael Agger* (East 86th Street Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, 19th Street East 6, 72nd Street East, State, and Village East Cinemas.)

BILLY ELLIOT
The British director Stephen Daldry has previously concentrated on theatre; now, as if to prove that he's a man for all art forms, he's made a film about ballet. Billy Elliot (Jamie Bell) is a slim, pugnacious boy who doesn't enjoy his boxing lessons but casts a jealous glance at the dance class that rehearses nearby. He joins in, prospers, gets some private tuition from his careworn teacher (Julie Walters), and ends up auditioning for the Royal Ballet. Will he make it? Can you guess? Although the film is set during the miners' strike of 1984 (the most grievous strife in Britain's recent history), it slowly sheds its anger and abrasive comedy in favor of something softer. The best thing on view is Bell, whose ratty, unsentimental demeanor just about sees the story through.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 10/30/00.) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Cinema II, and Lincoln Square.)

BOUNCE
It doesn't. Ben Affleck plays a callous Los Angeles ad salesman; Gwyneth Paltrow is a young widow; each has reasons to feel guilty about starting a love affair, but the affair happens nonetheless. After some initial comic awkwardness, which is entertaining, the movie slips into trite predictability. Poor Affleck has to be humbled—he gets to eat crow even before he's established himself on screen as a cad. Written and directed by Don Roos, who did far far better with his 1998 comedy "The Opposite of Sex."—*David Denby* (12/4/00) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Gotham Cinema, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)



LA BÛCHE
Paris at Christmas, the time of torture: a family whose members don't much like one another plans to gather for a celebratory dinner. As they meet in pairs and trios, we discover crosscurrents of relationships and betrayals, and the movie becomes an intricate puzzle that comes together in the viewer's head. Danièle Thompson wrote the movie with her son Christopher Thompson, and also directed. Her work, at times, has a startling candor, as well as the typical French virtue of companionability. The attractive cast includes Claude Rich and Françoise Fabian as the divorced father and mother, and Sabine Azéma, Emmanuelle Béart, and Charlotte Gainsbourg as the daughters. The French economy may be faltering, but from the evidence of this movie the country's fascination with adultery has only increased. In French.—*D.D.* (Paris.)

CHARLIE'S ANGELS
It's the usual story: hitch a couple of electrodes to an old TV show, flick the switch, and hope that it comes surging back to life. This latest effort can't be faulted for energy, but, in most other respects, it barely gives a twitch. The Angels are played by Lucy Liu, Drew Barrymore, and, most engagingly, Cameron Diaz. The plot entails satellites, cell phones, and a threat to "world privacy"—not, one might suppose, a profound cause of anxiety for our flamboyant heroines. The director is someone, or something, called McG, and he, or it, seems content to bundle one high-kicking, high-volume scene on top of the next. You can't hear yourself think, which is probably a good thing.—*A.L.* (11/13/00) (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE CONTENDER
Vigorously unsubtle political entertainment. The Democratic President, Jackson Evans (Jeff Bridges), a wily, dominating fellow who may not be good at heart, nominates a woman, Senator Laine Hanson (Joan Allen), to be his Vice-President after the sitting Vice-President dies. A Republican congressman, Shelly Runyon (Gary Oldman), wants to block her. His weapon: some photographs of her participation, as a college freshman, in a frat-house orgy. When the Senator stands on her dignity, refusing to answer Runyon's questions, the movie becomes an attack on double standards—a noble conception but also a needlessly solemn one. The picture is juicily well acted, however, particularly by Oldman. Written and directed by Rod Lurie, who uses Washington unimaginatively, like a TV-movie director.—*D.D.* (10/16 & 10/23/00) (Beekman and Chelsea Cinemas.)

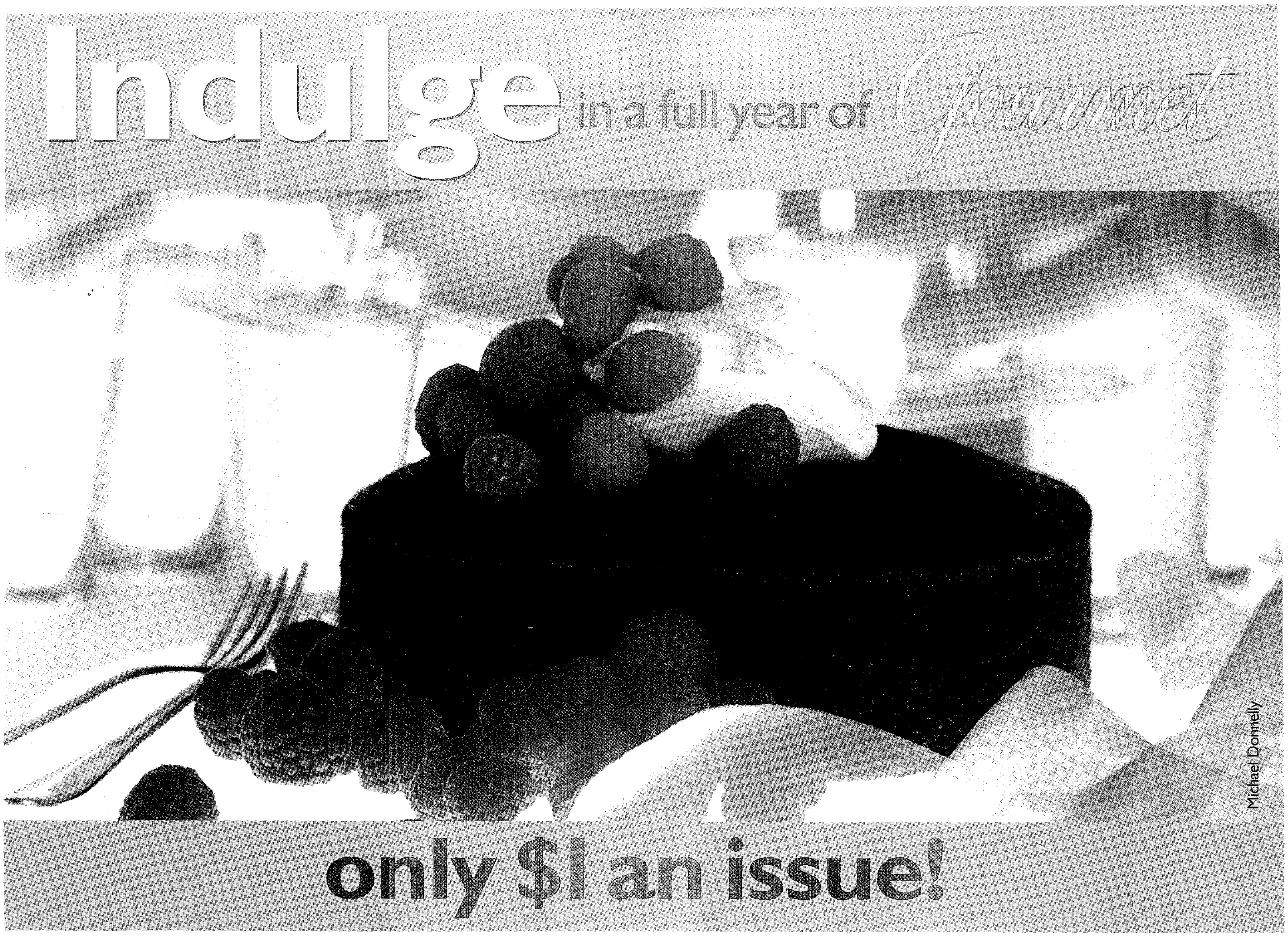
DANCER IN THE DARK
The new Lars Von Trier film makes his previous efforts seem like models of orthodoxy and restraint. Shot in Sweden, it's set in an America of Von Trier's own devising. Most of the characters speak with foreign accents, and the heroine—a timid, bespectacled factory worker and single mother named Selma—is played by Björk, the Icelandic pop munchkin. Selma has a congenital eye disease, and she is saving up to pay for an operation for her young son, who will otherwise follow her into blindness. The film is unashamedly two-toned, split between a granular authenticity and a stylized gaudiness. The musical scenes—in the factory, on a railroad track—have a deliberate, stamping awkwardness, overlaid with Björk's animal wailing. Many viewers have refused to stomach this unhealthy mixture, yet it feels laced with surprising power, and the harshness of the dénouement is unfeigned.—*A.L.* (9/25/00) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, State, and Union Square.)

THE GRINCH
A bold, not to say foolhardy, attempt to film Dr. Seuss. Jim Carrey plays the Grinch, a crabby, green-faced sluggard who lives at the top of Mt. Crumpit. He is consumed with loathing for the Whos, the cute race that lives in the valley below, and you can see his point: some of them are so doggedly joyous that they ought, at the very least, to be locked up. The director is Ron Howard, in a whimsical vein; the screen is so crammed with candy-colored detail that you come out feeling slightly sick, though children with a sweet tooth may succumb. The news that the Grinch is not really mean but simply misunderstood is no surprise, but it still spells doom for the movie. With Jeffrey Tambor and, hunting hard for laughs, Christine Baranski.—*A.L.* (11/27/00) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

A HARD DAY'S NIGHT
A satiric celebration of anarchic youth and the blast of oxygen they give a wheezing kingdom. The director, Richard Lester, and the screenwriter, Alun Owen, set out, in 1964, to show how the Beatles' phenomenal fame encased them in a cocoon. But the Fab Four aren't larvae—they're brilliant butterflies, and they have an unsurpassed rapport with their fans, whether in the streets of London or in a movie theatre. Lester directs fearlessly, shooting them every which way to capture their antic verve. The nonchalant iconoclast John Lennon "snorts" a Coke bottle; Paul McCartney, in a bowler hat and fake beard, clowns like an aristocratic elf. Ringo Starr becomes the group's hangdog mascot, George Harrison its pocket of moodiness. Lester devised strategies for making visual poetry out of rock which music-video directors have been stealing for decades. In one of the most glorious musical numbers in movie history, the Beatles break out of their keepers' care and zigzag through a field to the tune of "Can't Buy Me Love."—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum.)

THE LEGEND OF BAGGER VANCE
Robert Redford, directing in pastoral-elegy mode: the light is golden, the colors are blended, and drama is nowhere to be found. He's made a tall tale about golf in the early thirties, with Matt Damon as a Savannah athlete demoralized by the First World War and Will Smith as an angelic black caddie who emerges from the gloaming and restores Damon by whispering incomprehensible remarks in his ear about feeling his way to an "authentic stroke." With Charlize Theron around, Damon shouldn't have any trouble restoring himself through love, but the movie is too dreamy and silly for sex.—*D.D.* (11/6/00) (Battery Park 16, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, New York Twin, and Union Square.)

ME & ISAAC NEWTON
Michael Apted's subtly rewarding documentary about seven remarkable scientists, who discuss their



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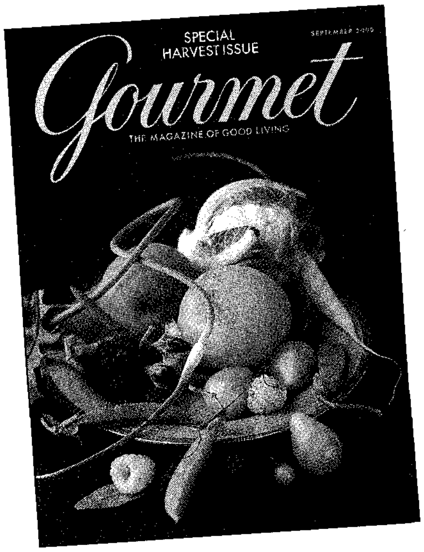


beginnings and their myriad discoveries. The group includes a chemist, two physicists, a cognitive scientist, a computer scientist, a cancer researcher, and a primatologist, and their warm, accessible manners make their accomplishments seem all the more inspiring. Apted travels to his subjects' natural surroundings, catching them at home, in a rain forest, or in an impoverished village, and then lets the camera do the work of discovering their motivations. He's an unobtrusive director (a skill he honed while working on his acclaimed "7-Up" series), and his eclectic intelligence brings out the boundless curiosity that drives these intrepid thinkers.—*Bruce Diones* (Cinema Village.)

MEET THE PARENTS

Jay Roach moves on from the campy delights of the Austin Powers series to direct this smoothly acted comedy of errors. Ben Stiller plays a modern man charged with a Victorian task: asking his girlfriend's father for permission to marry her. With a calamitous surname ("pronounced just like it's spelled, F-O-C-K-E-R") and a faintly hilarious profession (male nurse), Stiller seems like a sitting duck for the secretive, overprotective father, played by Robert De Niro. Stiller grovels, De Niro growls, and the girls (Blythe Danner and Teri Polo) watch from the sidelines. This is dumbed-up comedy: there are just enough unexpected moments to redeem all the easy pleasures of the slapstick.—*M.A.* (Battery Park 16, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

MEN OF HONOR

Robert De Niro's bizarre performance as a choleric Navy diver—spasmodic body movement and an out-of-the-swamp Southern accent—is the only genuine life in this exceptionally square military biography. An earnest Cuba Gooding, Jr., plays the real-life hero Carl Brashear, who overcame racist hazing to become the Navy's first black master diver in the nineteen-fifties. De Niro is the instructor who initially tries to discourage Brashear and then becomes his champion. Familiar as it may be, the story has stirring moments, although the screenwriter, Scott Marshall Smith, and the director, George Tillman, Jr., do their best to kill them. Each scene shows the hero facing some Challenge, which he sternly Confronts and then Overcomes.—*D.D.* (11/20/00) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, Empire 25, Murray Hill Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, 62nd & Broadway, Village East Cinemas, and Ziegfeld.)

ONE DAY IN SEPTEMBER

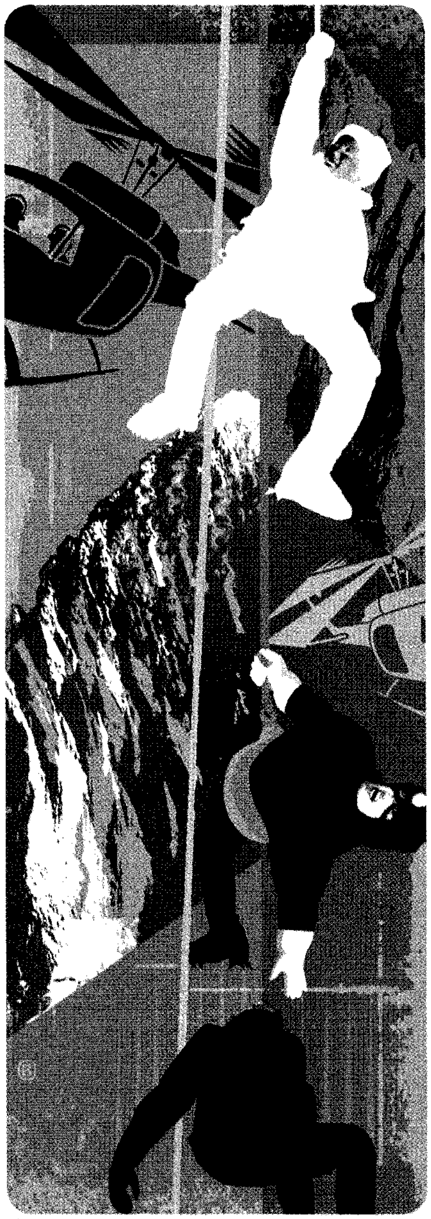
A skillful, unnerving documentary that re-creates the massacre of eleven Israeli athletes by Palestinian terrorists at the 1972 Munich Olympics. Even today, the ironies are painful to contemplate. The Germans, eager to dispel remaining doubts about the peaceable character of the "New Germany," kept security guards away from the Olympic Village and tried to persuade the Palestinians, once they had taken hostages, that the killing of Jews on German soil should not happen again. Later, at an airport near Munich, the local police performed with an ineptitude almost hard to believe. The movie, narrated by Michael Douglas, consists of period television footage, a few staged episodes, and interviews with participants, including the sole surviving terrorist and some very sheepish German officials. The massacre is not given sufficient historical context, but as a moment-by-moment report of a horrifying event the movie is both instructive and deeply upsetting. Directed by Kevin Macdonald. Produced by Arthur Cohn.—*D.D.* (Film Forum.)

PAY IT FORWARD

An embarrassingly ham-handed fable about doing good deeds, but worth seeing for Helen Hunt's first-rate performance as an alcoholic Las Vegas cocktail waitress and single mother—a woman with lousy judgment who wants to do the right thing but doesn't know how. As a classroom exercise, her son Trevor (Haley Joel Osment) devises the scheme of "pay it forward"—performing a gratuitous act of kindness for three people and then insisting that they do the same for three others. Trevor helps strangers, but, playing Cupid, he's more eager to help his mother meet his teacher (Kevin Spacey). It's a rum role for Spacey, who sacrifices his aura of malevolence by delivering an unconvincing, weepy confession fit for a TV movie. Written by Leslie Dixon, from Catherine Ryan Hyde's novel, and directed by Mimi Leder.—*D.D.* (11/6/00) (Chelsea West, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Waverly 1 and 2.)

QUILLS

Philip Kaufman turns eagerly back to sex, a topic that he has merely brushed against in the years since "Henry and June." Geoffrey Rush plays the Marquis de Sade, imprisoned in a lunatic asylum but determined to continue writing—and, if possible, publishing—his scurrilous works. He is befriended and, for a while, tolerated by the Abbé Coulmier (Joaquin Phoenix), the priest in charge; the regime darkens with the arrival of Dr. Royer-Collard (Michael Caine), who is under orders to block de Sade's creative juices. Add the ripe presence of a willing laundress (Kate Winslet), who smuggles out the manuscripts, and the stage is set: what for, it is never quite clear. The movie declines into a drab, cloistered hymn to freedom of speech, and Kaufman's directing of period frenzy is surprisingly leaden; rising above it is Rush, alternately cooing and blustery, and almost certainly preferable to the real Marquis.—*A.L.* (11/27/00) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)



"Vertical Limit," a high-altitude thriller directed by Martin Campbell.

JOHN RITTER

REQUIEM FOR A DREAM

Darren Aronofsky's new film stars Ellen Burstyn as Sara Goldfarb, a Brighton Beach widow who launches herself on a crash diet—a path that will lead to pill addiction and electroshock therapy. Meanwhile, her son Harry (Jared Leto) and his girlfriend, Marion (Jennifer Connelly), yield to the pull of hard drugs. Aronofsky divides them by split screen, and punches home their addictions with a blistering montage of pills, puffs, and dilating eyes. All this is managed with formidable skill, but it shuts the movie down, and the various junkies—even Burstyn, who gives the role everything she's got—end up looking less substantial than their respective poisons.—*A.L.* (10/9/00) (Union Square.)

THE 6TH DAY

Arnold Schwarzenegger gets cloned by a criminal corporation headed by a svelte entrepreneur (Tony Goldwyn) who wears silver-gray clothes and fashionable tiny glasses. The main interest of this science-fiction thriller is the design of its near-future setting—close enough to us that the technology is no more than an eerie extension of current manias. There is a virtual girlfriend who offers sex the minute her partner comes home and a doll, in the form of a complaining little girl, who is disturbingly human. The point seems to be that technology is erasing the difference between the human and the nonhuman and no one much cares. The writers, Cormac and Marianne Wibberly, and the director, Roger Spottiswoode, should have trusted this provocative idea and gone further with it. Instead, the film falls back on conventional elements: car chases, shootouts, and the like.—*D.D.* (11/20/00) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, and Union Square.)

UNBREAKABLE

Another sombre, accomplished Philadelphia story from M. Night Shyamalan, the writer and director of "The Sixth Sense." A smirkless and bald Bruce Willis plays a melancholy football-stadium guard who hides his inborn supernatural powers. Samuel L. Jackson, with a mass of Little Richard hair, is an irascible devotee of comic-book art who suffers from osteogenesis imperfecta; his bones crumble easily, and he's always taking spills and getting broken into pieces. He pursues Willis through the cheerless blue-gray city and tries to convince him that he must act like a superhero in the comics. Somehow this will redeem Jackson, an unhappy man who's physically incapable of doing anything at all. Jackson succeeds, but far too late in the movie, and there's no joy or liberation in Willis's sudden aggression. The fantasy never makes much sense (what *is* Willis supposed to do for Jackson?), but the picture is impressively controlled—slow-moving, morose, frightening, hushed.—*D.D.* (12/4/00) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Waverly.)

VENUS BEAUTY INSTITUTE

A melancholy portrait of a perversely lonely Parisian single woman (Nathalie Baye) who picks up men at will but revolts when a raffishly handsome sculptor (Samuel Le Bihan) falls in love with her. Filmed in the luscious, synthetic blue-and-pink hues of the beauty parlor in which the heroine works, the picture offers a nonjudgmental view of women's obsessions and of sexual temperaments in all their variety. Unfortunately, it loses drive and focus near the end and slips away—it's half of a very good movie. Bulle Ogier plays the proprietor of the beauty shop; Tonie Marshall wrote and directed. In French.—*D.D.* (59th Street East Cinema and Quad Cinema.)

THE YARDS

A lowering, heavy-browed thriller from the director James Gray, who made a name for himself

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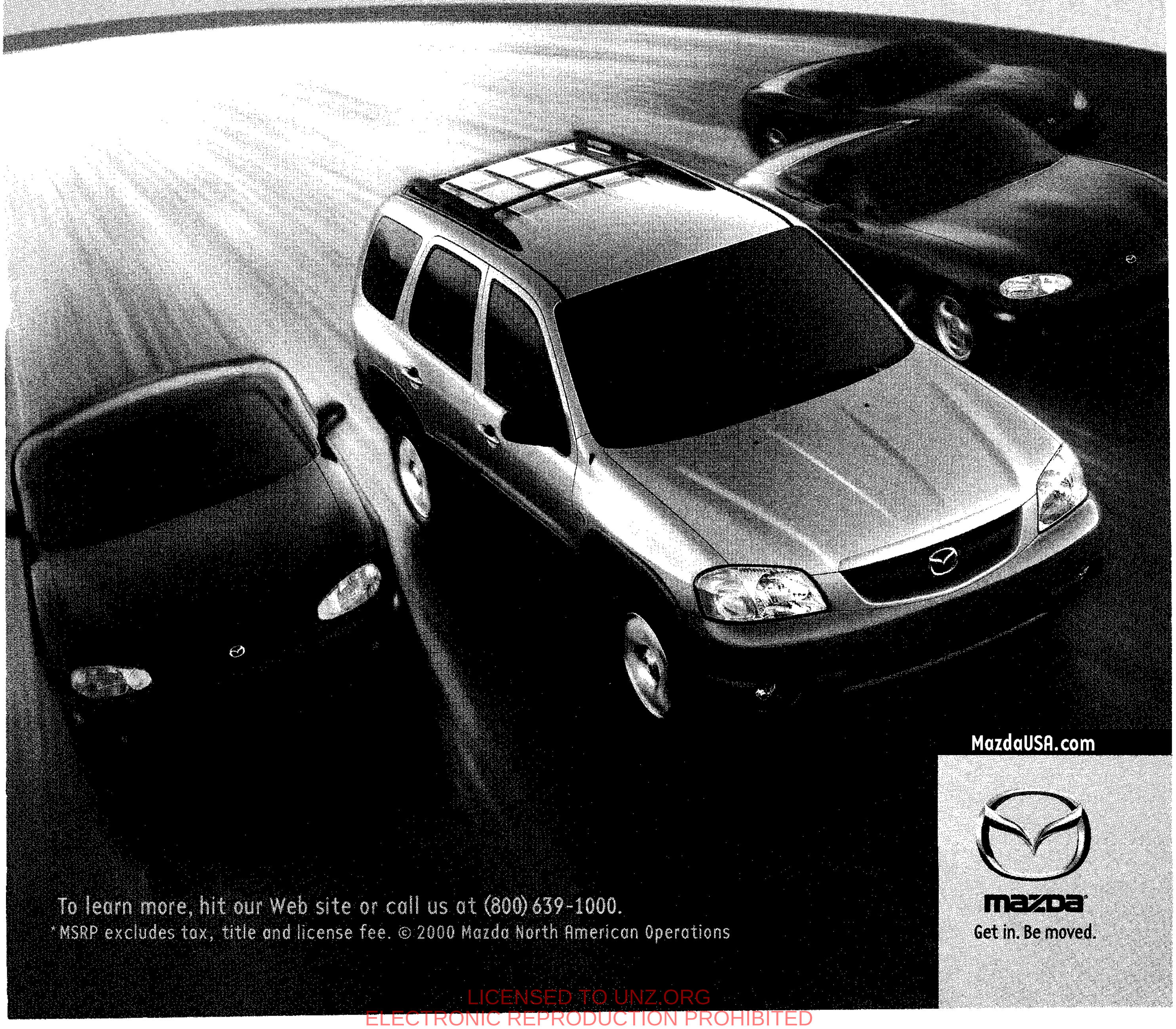

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with “Little Odessa.” In many ways, this is more of the same: a tight and sometimes tortured community, the sober settling of scores, and what feels like an official rationing of daylight. Mark Wahlberg plays Leo, who’s trying to go straight; he takes a job as sidekick to his old friend Willie (Joaquin Phoenix), who fixes contracts for the New York subway system. Things go well, then badly, then worse still, until Leo is dwelling in subterranean solitude—Gray’s kind of place. The supporting cast is tough and tested: Faye Dunaway, Ellen Burstyn, and especially James Caan, who plays Leo’s uncle by marriage. The film may be humorless, unflustered by the need to quicken or amuse, but it feels unfashionably true to itself. Gray has reconstructed a world that he knows, and conjured a mood that no one else would have the nerve to maintain.—*A.L.* (10/30/00) (Village East Cinemas.)

YOU CAN COUNT ON ME
The first-rate actress Laura Linney—bland on the surface but with angry impulses churning underneath—gives a detailed and involving performance as a single working mother in a small and somewhat boring upstate New York town. When her screwup of a kid brother (Mark Ruffalo) returns from Alaska, she’s torn between tossing him out and letting him stay on and become a companion to her fatherless son (Rory Culkin). The movie was written and directed by the playwright and screenwriter Kenneth Lonergan, who pays close attention to the way so many of us are divided between good and bad impulses—including bad impulses we desperately need to act on if we’re not going to feel half-dead. Lonergan’s work is quiet but intense, and Ruffalo—dark and sensual and agonizingly confused—gives a heartbreaking performance. With Matthew Broderick and Jon Tenney as Linney’s suitors.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Lincoln Square.)

ALSO PLAYING

ALMOST FAMOUS (9/18/00)
Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.

BAMBOOZLED (10/9/00)
Empire 25.

KIPPUR
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

LITTLE NICKY
Battery Park 16, Cinema 3rd Avenue, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.

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Waverly 1 and 2.

A TIME FOR DRUNKEN HORSES
Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

WONDER BOYS
Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.

YI YI (A ONE AND A TWO)
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

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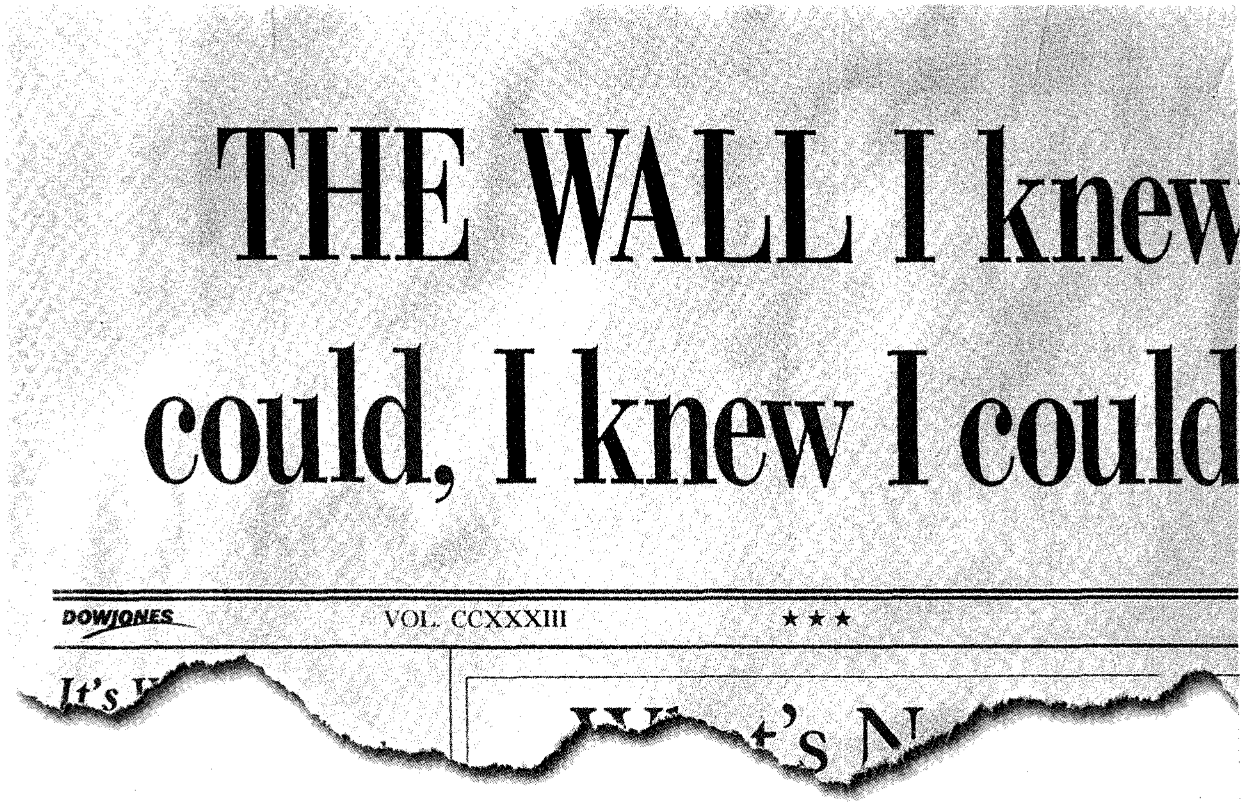
Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St. (945-3418).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600).
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.



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REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

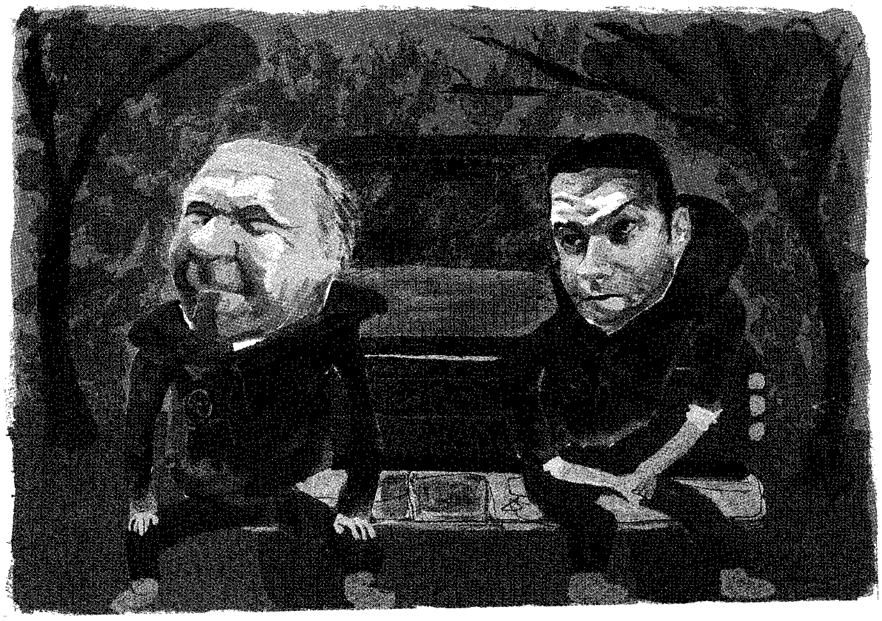
Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Three films about Berlin. Dec. 9 at 2: “Berlin, Symphony of a City” (1927, Walter Ruttman). ♦ Dec. 9 at 4 and Dec. 10 at 2 and 4:30: “Berlin-Cinéma (Titre Provisoire)” (1999, Samira Gloor-Fadel; in German and French). ♦ Dec. 9-10 at 6:30: “Wings of Desire” (1987, Wim Wenders; in German and French).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—Dec. 6 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: “Something to Sing About” (2000, Charlie Jordan). ♦ Dec. 7 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: “Let’s Meet in the Ocean” (2000, Frank Scheffer). ♦ Dec. 8 at 7:30: “Marketa Lazarová” (1967, Frantisek Vlácil; in Czech). ♦ Dec. 9 at 2 and 6:50: “The Cremator” (1968, Juraj Herz; in Czech). ♦ Dec. 9 at 4:30 and 9:10: “Case for a Rookie Hangman” (1969, Pavel Jurácek; in Czech). ♦ Dec. 10 at 2 and 6:50: “Diamonds of the Night” (1964, Jan Nemec; in Czech). ♦ Dec. 10 at 4:30 and 9:10: “And the Fifth Horseman Is Fear” (1965, Zbynek Brynych; in Czech). ♦ Dec. 11 at 4, 6:50, and 9:30: “Smoking” (1993, Alain Resnais; in French). ♦ Dec. 12 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: “Tosca’s Kiss” (1984, Daniel Schmid; in Italian).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through Jan. 2: A Luis Buñuel centennial retrospective. All films are in Spanish. Dec. 7 at 6 and Dec. 9 at 2: “The Young and the Damned” (1950). ♦ Dec. 8 at 2:30 and Dec. 10 at 5: “Daughter of Deceit” (1951). ♦ Dec. 8 at 6: “A Woman Without Love” (1951). ♦ Dec. 8 at 8 and Dec. 10 at 2: “The Brute” (1952). ♦ Dec. 9 at 5 and Dec. 11 at 2:30: “The Devil and the Flesh” (1950). ♦ Dec. 11 at 6 and Dec. 12 at 2:30: “Mexican Bus Ride” (1951). ♦ A retrospective of films about lost childhood. Dec. 9 at 5:30 and Dec. 11 at 2: “Tess” (1979, Roman Polanski). ♦ Dec. 10 at 3 and Dec. 12 at 3: “Naked Hearts” (1966, Édouard Luntz; in French). ♦ Dec. 10 at 5 and Dec. 11 at 6: “The Unknown Soldier’s Patent Leather Shoes” (1979, Rangel Vulchanov; in Bulgarian).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Dec. 8-27: Contemporary cinema from Spain. All films are in Spanish. Dec. 8 at 1 and Dec. 10 at 9: “Come Back to My Side” (1999, Gracia Querejeta). ♦ Dec. 8 at 3, Dec. 10 at 6:45, and Dec. 12 at 3:15: “Nobody Knows Anybody” (1999, Mateo Gil). ♦ Dec. 8 at 5:15 and Dec. 9 at 9:15: “La Comunidad” (2000, Alex de la Iglesia). ♦ Dec. 9 at 6:30 and Dec. 12 at 1: “Compassionate Sex” (2000, Laura Mañá). ♦ Dec. 10 at 4:15: “Plenilunio” (2000, Imanol Uribe). ♦ Movies for children. Dec. 9-10 at 2: “Who Framed Roger Rabbit?” (1988, Robert Zemeckis).



Opening December 8, Ned Beatty and Liev Schreiber in “Spring Forward.”

R. GREGORY CHRISTIE

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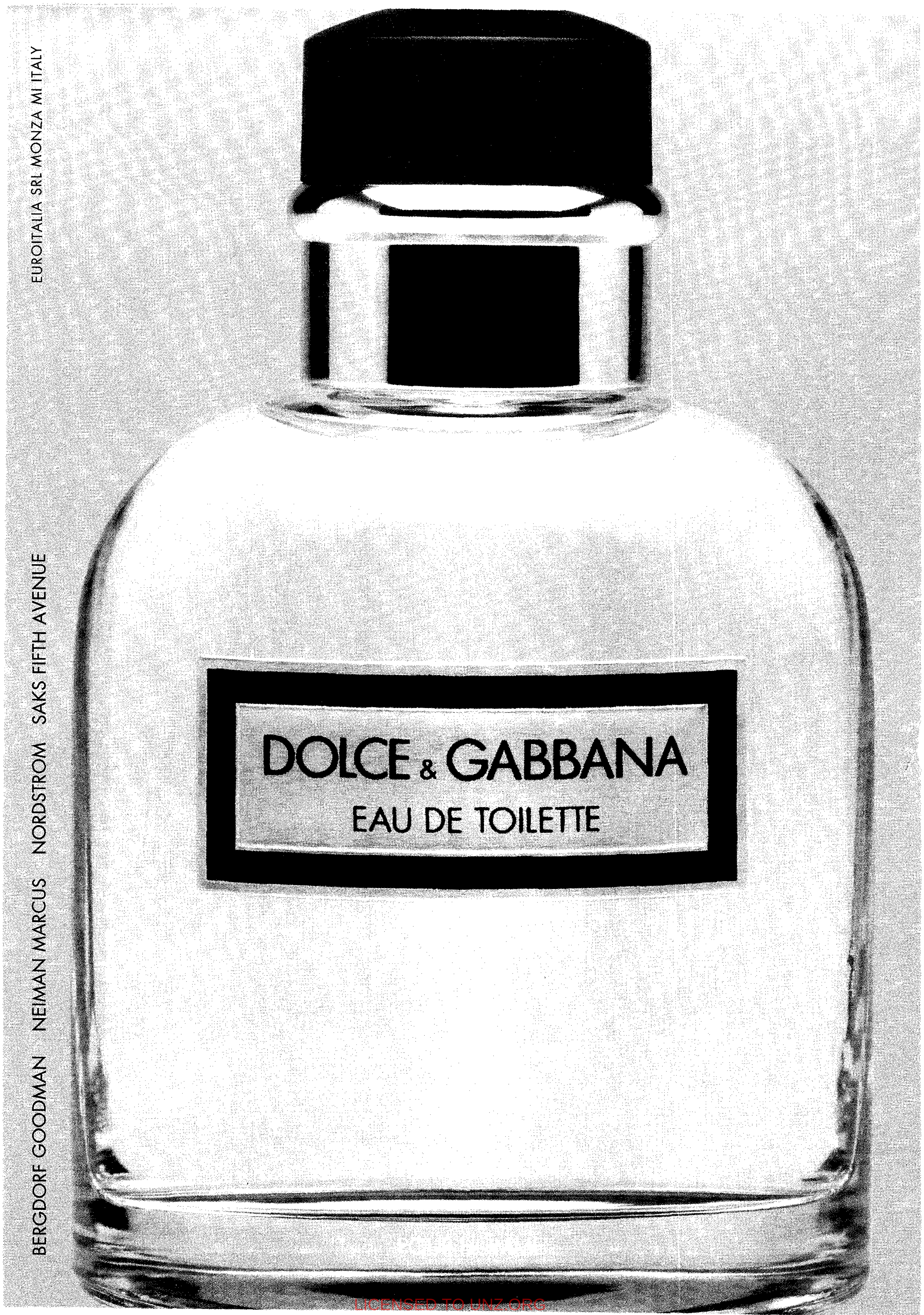
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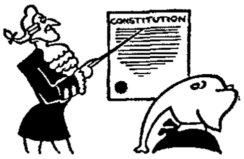
THE NEW YORKER

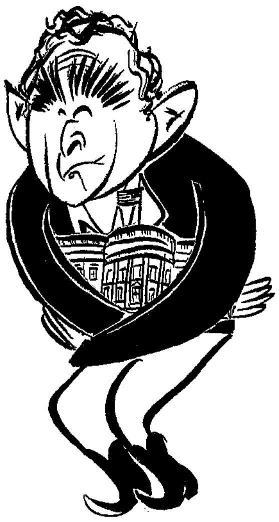
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
ALL PERFECTLY LEGAL



By the end of last week, the outcome of the 2000 election, though still formally undetermined, was not really in doubt. Two realities loomed like beasts in the mist: that George W. Bush will be the next President of the United States; and that Al Gore will emerge as the clear winner of "the popular vote"—our name for what other democracies that elect presidents call, simply, "the vote." Bush will be President because possession is nine-tenths of the law, and he has all along possessed, in the shifting official tabulations of the Florida tally, a tiny numerical lead in that state; and because his brother is the state's governor and his campaign co-chair the state's Secretary of State; and because his allies and lawyers have stifled the recounts that might have counted; and because justice takes time, and there is no time; and because the Florida legislature, which is controlled by his party, is ready, if necessary, to set aside the troublesome vote of Florida's people and appoint electors of its own choosing. That would be unprecedented, and it would be cynical, and it would be arrogant, and it would be (in the generally accepted, common-sense meaning of the word) undemocratic. But it would not be, on the face of it, either illegal or unconstitutional.

For these reasons and more, Bush is, if not quite President-elect, President-appoint. As for Gore's plurality in the national popular vote, during the first couple of weeks after Election Day some observers suggested that it might be reversed by absentee ballots, which often break in a Republican direction. This is now prohibitively unlikely. In contrast to 1960, when John F. Kennedy's lead over Richard Nixon eventually fell from around three hundred thousand the day after the election to less than a hundred and twenty thousand, Gore's lead has actually grown as the supplementary returns have trickled in. The day after the election it was 97,773; a week after that it was 230,449; and as of the end of last week it was 357,576. The largest packets of still uncounted votes are in states that Gore carried. By the time all the states have certified their totals later this month, Gore's plurality will likely be somewhere between a quarter of a million and four hundred thousand.


George W. Bush

Whatever the official vote count in Florida, it now seems beyond dispute that more citizens of that state went to the polls intending to vote for Gore than for Bush. In order to demonstrate this, the butterfly ballots of Palm Beach—the ones that produced the curious phenomenon of Jews for Buchanan—need not be invoked. In a careful report published on November 19th in the Orlando *Sentinel*, Sean Holton and Jeff Kunerth analyzed the voting systems used in Florida. The most dependable—pen-marked, precinct-tabulated ballots, a system that allows a bad ballot to be kicked back immediately to the voter so that it can be corrected—was used mostly in counties where Bush was strong. The least dependable system, punch-card ballots, was used in counties where Gore was strong. "If all 67 counties had been using the same type of system," Holton and Kunerth conclude, "Gore might have gone ahead of Bush in the totals for Nov. 7, by a margin of more than 1,700 votes. This scenario emerges whether voters used the most reliable system or the least reliable—as long as it was used uniformly statewide."

It is important to stress that Gore's popular-vote plurality (as he himself has repeatedly acknowledged) has no constitutional or legal significance. But that does not mean it has no significance at

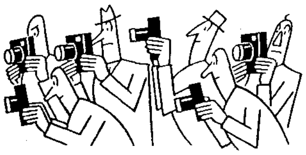
ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

all. It is the moral basis for his challenge to the Florida count, and a firm basis it is. It is also the political basis for that challenge: if Bush had been the one whose national plurality now stood at a third of a million, any effort by Gore to reverse the Electoral College outcome by nibbling at a Bush lead of a few hundred votes in a single state would have been unsustainable. It would have been seen—rightly, and not just by excitable conservative ideologues—as an attempt to steal the election. The effort, therefore, would never have been made. But politically and morally, if not constitutionally, Gore's popular-vote plurality makes all the difference in the world.

If, as seems close to certain, Bush takes office next month, he will do so by virtue of a series of maneuvers that will have been—though by definition legal and constitutional—contemptible. The moral and political legitimacy of his victory will remain to be earned. Bush ran as an opponent of "partisan bickering," and the substance behind that rhetoric will be severely tested. (On that score, it must be said, his behavior since Election Day has not been reassuring.) Gore ran as a fighter. Now he is going down as a fighter, and the fight he has waged has been a service to his party and—because it has shone the unflattering light of truth on America's electoral systems—to his country, too. As that fight approaches its dismal and probably inevitable end, Gore's determination—in the face of scorn from pundits and, at the beginning, even from some of his own supporters—has begun to look less and less like petulance and more and more like grit.

—Hendrik Hertzberg

ON FLEET STREET
MADONNA MANIA

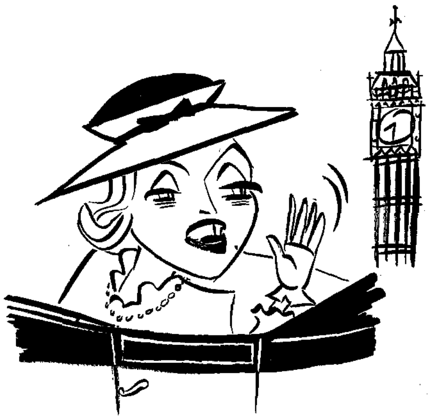


Dominic Mohan, who is the show-business editor of the *Sun*, Britain's best-selling daily, has seen a few celebrity promotions in his time, but nothing prepared him for what happened when he offered his readers a hundred free tickets to a Madonna concert last week, her first live performance in England in seven years. "I got E-mails from Venezuela, Russia, Brazil, and all over Great Britain," Mohan said, the day after the show. "One man offered two thousand pounds. Another said he was prepared to give me his wife for the night, with her consent, in return for two tickets." Mohan turned the fellow down. "I've never seen anything like this reaction," he said. "It's real Madonna mania."

Something funny is going on between Madonna and the inhabitants of the United Kingdom. Since taking up with an Englishman, the film director Guy Ritchie ("Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels"), bearing his son (Rocco), and announcing her intention to live in London full time, Madonna has replaced the late Diana, Princess of Wales, as Fleet Street's favorite mother. Every move she makes is exhaustively reported and analyzed: from having dinner at San Lorenzo (Diana's old haunt) to buying a house in Notting Hill (or is it Belgravia—nobody knows for sure) and trying to get her daughter, Lourdes, a spot at Cheltenham Ladies' College, the snootiest girls' school in the country.

The fascination with Madonna started in the tabloids but quickly spread to the *Times*, the *Guardian*, and the *Daily Telegraph*, all of which covered last week's concert in their news pages, not their arts sections. The *Times* commissioned Rodney Milnes, its eminent opera critic, whose last pop purchase was (he thinks) by Gerry and the Pacemakers, to reflect on Madonna's œuvre. "Luckily, I have reached the age when such considerations are largely theoretical, but she is quite indescribably sexy, and knows it," he wrote.

"Since we're restricted with what we can write about Prince Harry and Prince William, we're left with Charles and Andrew, which isn't too thrilling," the *Sun's* Mohan said, with commendable honesty. "If we put Madonna on the front page, sales go up." The singer is, of course, happy to play the game, but she seems genuinely to like England, despite the fact that, according to Mohan's latest scoop, her house was recently robbed while she slept. "She says 'bollocks' and 'plonker,' and things like that," Mohan says.



Madonna

She also let it slip that she would like to get married to the aforesaid Ritchie in St. Paul's Cathedral, the scene of Diana's wedding, or in Westminster Abbey. Even on Fleet Street, this request was considered a bit over the top, an attitude reflected in the *Sun's* weekly "White Van Man" column, which records the wisdom of the workingman. "Madonna's taking this British thing a bit far, isn't she?" said Shaun McGrath, of Bolton, Lancashire. "Who does she *think* she is, the Queen?"

—John Cassidy

THE NEVERENDING STORY
BLAME THE PRESS!

Which is scariest: a Republican thug, an ambitious mayor, or a newsman on deadline? As American voters try to find out why the Miami-Dade County Canvassing Board abandoned its plan to hand count more than ten thousand disputed ballots, the Gore campaign has argued that the three-person board was frightened off by the mob of Republican operatives who stampeded Miami's county hall, screaming and pounding on doors. The *Times*, meanwhile, has asked whether Alex Penelas, the mayor of Miami-Dade County, may have had something to do with it. Inquiring voters can now add to that list the usual suspect: the media.

Early on the Wednesday morning before Thanksgiving, the election board agreed to recount the 10,750 ballots that had registered no Presidential preference when they were scanned by machine. To do so, it had to separate out those "undervoted" ballots from the 650,000 others. This required running all the ballots through the vote-counting machines in the "tabulation room" on the nineteenth floor of Miami's County Hall. But the tabulation room presented a problem. Up to that time, the thirty or forty members of the media on hand had been covering the action in a spacious conference room on the eighteenth floor, where the election board had begun the recount. The tabulation room was like a miniature maternity ward, small and cramped, with a glass window through which observers could see but not hear. In other words, there was no room for the media.

Well, that wasn't going to do. Informed that the show was moving upstairs, some of the reporters and photographers had a fit. "It was chaos," said Paul Lomartire, a reporter for the Palm Beach *Post*. "The truth of the matter was that it was the *reporters* pounding on the doors. Down here in Miami, boy, some of these local TV reporters, they are brutal!"

The less brutal ones whipped out cell phones and began calling their lawyers. "They threatened to sue us, saying their First Amendment rights were being infringed," a county official said. One reporter, the *Wall Street Journal's* Nicholas Kulish, dashed off a petition to David Leahy, the election supervisor, which a dozen other reporters signed, saying that if the media was barred from the counting room they were "prepared to go to court."

Mayco Villafaña, Miami-Dade County's director of communications, says he tried to set up a pool that would have allowed reporters inside the counting room a few at a time. Amid the chaos, it went nowhere. Then he looked into setting up an audio and video feed, but decided that it would take too long (largely, he said, because Republican protesters were clogging the floor). By then, the election board had already lost much of the morning, and the three members convened and decided to give up. "They looked at the logistics of finishing by Sunday, having lost a half day, and said there was no way it could be done," Villafaña said. "It was the media that delayed the process." (He added that he was not accusing anyone from the media of acting unprofessionally.)

Mark Seibel, an assistant managing editor for the Miami *Herald*, agrees. "You could pin the decision not to keep counting on the news media," he admitted. At this point, it may be too late for Gore, but not for the *Herald*. At Seibel's urging, the paper has now sued the county to get access to the disputed ballots. He said, "Hell, if they aren't going to count 'em, we will."

—*Jane Mayer*

FAMILY PLOTS
BOWLES AT REST

Paul Bowles—the novelist, poet, and composer, and the most famous American expatriate in Morocco until his death, a year ago—was sitting at Gate 2 in the U.S. Airways terminal at LaGuardia the other day, waiting for a twin-prop commuter plane to fly him upstate, to a little town called Glenora. Or at least what was left of Paul Bowles was sitting there. What was left of Paul Bowles was his ashes, which were being transported to Glenora in a metal cannister by the executor of Bowles's estate, Joe McPhillips. McPhillips is the headmaster of the American School of Tangier and was a friend of Bowles for nearly forty years. He was dressed in a three-piece suit and a gray overcoat; from across the terminal, he looked like a more elegant version of Albert Finney. An Irish-Catholic native of Alabama, McPhillips, who is sixty-four years old, went to Andover and Princeton and lived in Greenwich Village just long enough during the nineteen-sixties to pass now for an expatriate New Yorker.

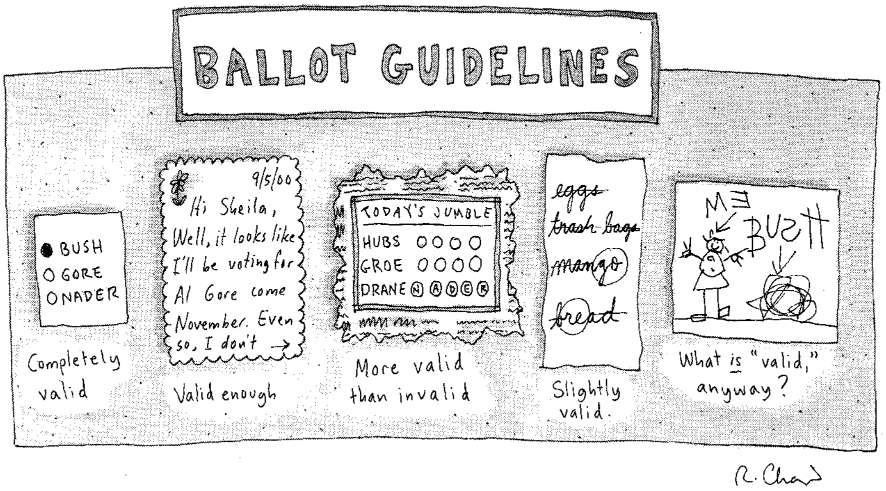
"You know, I consider it very stressful to leave Tangier," he said as he boarded the plane. He carried the cannister of Bowles's remains, which he had picked up at the Frank E. Campbell funeral home a few days earlier, in an L.L. Bean canvas tote bag. He stowed the ashes under the seat in front of him, then reminisced about Bowles and Tangier—he'd always assumed that Bowles would be buried in Morocco and was surprised that he had chosen upstate New York instead. "I would have talked him out of it," McPhillips said. "It's the most barbaric thing he could have done. It's a pain in the ass, for one thing. But it's ironic, and of course he would have liked that." As the plane sped off down the runway, McPhillips shouted over the engines, "In a way, it's very *Bowles!*"

In Binghamton, McPhillips changed planes for a quick flight to Elmira. While he stood in the aisle of the tiny plane, the pilot, to McPhillips's horror, picked up the canvas bag containing the ashes. "It'll be all right here," the pilot said, putting the bag in the luggage rack. McPhillips slumped into his seat.

When the plane landed, McPhillips was picked up by John Magagna, an old Morocco friend. In the car, he relaxed a bit as he took in the landscape: the white clapboard houses, the wooded hills, the autumn leaves, and, eventually, on the outskirts of Glenora, the solemn deep-blue water of Seneca Lake. They turned onto a dirt road that led into Lakemont Cemetery, a tranquil patch of trees and gravestones that stood between an old vineyard and a cornfield, overlooking the lake.

"My Lord," McPhillips said, looking around.

"Maybe Mr. Bowles knew what



he was doing after all," Magagna said.

Toward the back of the cemetery, a small crowd of a dozen people stood waiting. Word of the burial had apparently got out. "There they are," McPhillips said, nodding ominously toward the group. He walked off quickly to meet the cemetery overseer, Tom Chadwick, who showed him the graves of Paul Bowles's parents and grandparents—his father worked as a dentist in Queens, and his grandfather had a summer house in Glenora—and the adjacent eighteen-inch-by-eighteen-inch hole that he had dug for Bowles. The devotees, meanwhile, moved in on McPhillips. He greeted them graciously, if warily. There were friends and neighbors of Bowles from Tangier, a Bowles biographer, a Bowles translator, a Bowles photographer, and a man from Chicago, in a light-gray suit, who claimed to have become a close friend of Bowles in his final years.

McPhillips stood before them and lowered the cannister of ashes into the ground. People asked whether they could touch it. "Uh, yes, O.K.," he said. He held out another box, which he'd brought from Tangier. "If anyone has anything they'd like to place in it—well, they can," he said. "I brought some earth from Morocco and a tape of his music." Into the box went a coin and some flowers. Next, Chadwick produced a big black plastic bucket full of dirt. McPhillips offered everyone a chance with the shovel, and each person, taking it, spoke: "I wish we had known you, Paul." "I love you very much and I was happy to be your friend." "Pablo, I love you." The woman who referred to Bowles as Pablo photographed the hole while a man videotaped her photographing the hole. And then the ceremony was over, and McPhillips headed briskly back toward the car.

Driving away, he shuffled through his folder of burial notes and looked momentarily stricken. "Ah, here's the passage I was going to read. I forgot," he said. It was the scene from "The Sheltering Sky" in which Port dies: "A black star appears, a point of darkness in the night sky's clarity. Point of darkness and gateway to repose. Reach out, pierce the fine fabric of the sheltering sky, take repose." McPhillips read the passage to himself, and when he finished he said, "Oh, dear." Then he closed the folder and stared ahead quietly.

—*Robert Sullivan*

SAN FRANCISCO POSTCARD
THE CATERED CHRONICLE

Attention, "Front Page" fans: Phil Bronstein, the gung-ho editor of the new San Francisco *Chronicle*, is bestowing upon his staff some West Coast life-style perks that may just possibly spread eastward. On Thanksgiving afternoon, Bronstein, who is cowboy-booted and deceptively mild-mannered, was on his way to the *Chronicle* offices, having left his wife, the actress Sharon Stone, and their six-month-old son, Roan, at a neighbor's dinner party. "Everybody else is coming to work today, too," he said. "We're giving everybody hot meals twenty-four hours a day. We're giving them free full-hour body massages. We're having psychologists available, free to one and all. Everybody is pitching in."

Until a few weeks ago, Bronstein was the executive editor of the San Francisco *Examiner*, which was for a hundred and thirteen years the flagship paper of the Hearst empire. After the Hearst Corporation bought the *Chronicle*, in 1999, the Justice Department's antitrust division pressed the company to find somebody else to take over the *Examiner*, so last month Hearst decided to give sixty-six million dollars to a businessman named Ted Fang to help him acquire and run the paper. A week before Thanksgiving, Bronstein learned that he would be the editor of the new *Chronicle*. A few days later, he put out his very first *Chronicle* (on time), and Fang's first *Examiner* appeared (seven hours late).

"Astonishing that we got it out," Bronstein said, on Thanksgiving. "My entire *Examiner* staff opted to come with me to the *Chronicle*." The *Chronicle* still adjoins the old *Examiner's* building, on Mission Street. As Bronstein drove up, a grinning young man, a caterer named Michael McDonough, put his head inside the car window and said, "You've got roast tom turkey with giblet gravy and savory sage-and-sausage stuffing, honey-baked spiral ham, Brussels sprouts with carrots, warm apple cider, and pumpkin pie with fresh whipped cream. For three hundred. Everybody's eating now."

"Good," Bronstein said, going inside.

McDonough followed, saying, "And tomorrow we're having dim sum and quiche. And a wide variety of sandwiches and pastas and potato salad all day Saturday. And, on Sunday, Caesar salad and lasagna and two cappuccino machines all day in the editorial area. On Monday, you'll have three thousand new blue *Chronicle* mugs and fifteen hundred Krispy Kremes. Did you eat yet?"

"I had a banana early this morning," Bronstein said, wallking toward his office, passing signs that read "JOINING FORCES TO BUILD A GREAT NEWSPAPER" and "WELCOME TO DIM SUM FRIDAY!"

In his office, Bronstein picked up the first issue of Ted Fang's *Examiner* and headed for the city room, pausing at desks where people wearing *Chronicle* caps were busy at their computers. "Thank you for working," Bronstein said repeatedly.

In the composing room, a worker wearing an apron took Bronstein's copy of the *Examiner* and said, "Did you see how they got the ink all wrong? And that story on page eight?" He pointed to a headline about "Seussical" and read the subhead under it: " 'Few eat enough vegetables, only 29% exercise for an hour a day, study reports.' "

The composing man and Bronstein shared a laugh at the *Examiner's* goof. Then Bronstein ran into a couple of the psychologists who were on duty. Both of them looked run-down and forlorn.

"How's it going?" Bronstein asked.

"Well, O.K., *O.K.*," one replied.

"Did you get dinner?" Bronstein asked.

They nodded. "I had two pastas—your typical Thanksgiving dinner," one said, and both psychologists seemed to be cheered up by this joke.

Over at the new *Examiner*, Bob Porterfield, the managing editor, didn't sound too jealous when he heard about the carryings-on at the *Chronicle*. He said that nothing like it was happening at his paper. "They can afford the luxury items, but we're the underdog," he said. "The only thing we can offer is free tickets to the striptease bars in the neighborhood."

—*Lillian Ross*

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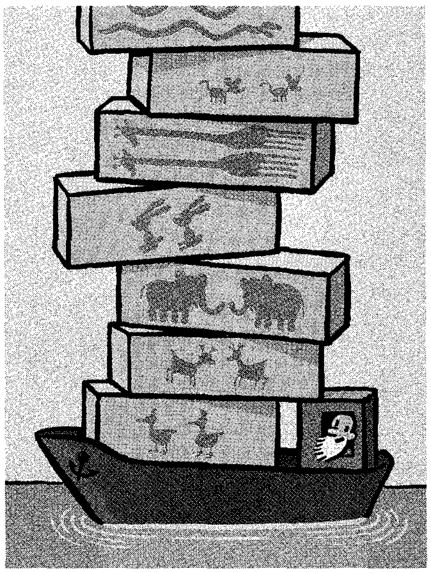
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
THE BOX THAT LAUNCHED A THOUSAND SHIPS

The heart of the global economy is a rectangular metal box, forty feet long, eight feet wide, and eight and a half feet tall. It's called a freight container, and it can hold up to sixty thousand pounds of goods: sneakers, khakis, televisions, DRAM chips, whatever. Two days before Thanksgiving, about two thousand of these containers were piled thirteen across and as many as fourteen deep aboard the Mette Maersk as it sat in its slip in Port Elizabeth, New Jersey. The ship's captain, Thomas Hansen, watched from the bridge as giant cranes lifted containers directly from truck to ship and from ship to truck. Hansen, a stocky Dane with a carefully groomed mustache, closely monitored how quickly the cargo was moved on and off the ship. His schedule was tight. This was the Mette Maersk's twelfth stop on a voyage that had begun a month before, in Hong Kong. It had arrived that morning from Charleston, South Carolina, and was due to cast off for Le Havre in five hours. Hansen was eager to get going. "The pressure never lets up," he said. "You can never go fast enough."

It wasn't just the caffeine talking. In the information age, the captain of a container ship like the Mette Maersk has to do a lot more than steer his vessel clear of icebergs and pirates. He's the point man in a supply-chain network that extends around the world, linking factories in the Far East, manufacturers in the United States, and retail stores all over the globe. If the world has become one big assembly line, the container ship is its conveyor belt.

Back in 1956, when a man named Malcolm McLean loaded fifty-eight truck trailers onto a ship bound from Newark to Houston, few imagined that these clunky boxes would revolutionize world trade. The idea was simple: you can save more shipping time in port than at sea. Before the advent of containers, goods were mostly loaded and unloaded from ship to shore box by box, which was slow, expensive, and unreliable (as in "It fell off the back of a truck"). The container made the process quick and cheap. By the late sixties, container ships were crossing the oceans regularly, and their impact was immediate. Those longshoremen from "On the Waterfront" gradually grew obsolete. Shipping costs plummeted. Asia boomed. Mass production went global.

Sure, Captain Hansen may get short shrift from *Business 2.0.* But if you think globalization is strictly the province of landlubbing, Surge-slurping software engineers, ask yourself when you last had a pair of pants delivered through your T1 line. In recent years, container ships have only become more important. Since the late nineteen-eighties, the cost of shipping has fallen as much as tenfold, to the point where it generally makes up just one per cent of an item's final retail price. A decade or so ago, it cost thirty dollars to ship a high-end VCR. Today, it costs about a buck-fifty. Container ships now carry twice as much cargo as they did then, and handle it with far more speed and precision. It's no longer enough to deliver those cathode-ray tubes to Long Beach by Tuesday. You have to get them there Tuesday at noon, and have them on deck, ready for the cranes, when the trucks pull onto the pier.



CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

Matching your schedule to your customers is the beauty part, of course, but it's the hard part, too. For every container that comes off a ship, another container should come aboard. Those coming off need to be on top, where the cranes can reach them easily, without having to unload half the ship's cargo. The arrival and departure of the trucks must be meticulously choreographed. The task of keeping track of a shipload of containers—not to mention the trucks, the cranes, and the hundreds of other vessels in your fleet—is gargantuan.

It's not a business for slackers, and the shippers that have managed to stay afloat have done so by introducing sophisticated technologies to the brute simplicity of McLean's metal box. Maersk Sealand, which owns Hansen's vessel, has invested hundreds of millions in building its own terminals at most of the ports where its ships dock, so that it has greater control over the number of container "moves" that take place every hour. It now works more closely with its biggest clients to cut down on time spent waiting for trucks, and has invested heavily in technology to solve the mathematical puzzle of what belongs where when. Each vessel now has a separate control room where a computer tracks every container on board. The containers, identified as either "dry" or "reefer" (for "refrigerated"), are color-coded according to their eventual destination. When everything is where it's supposed to be, the screen is filled with solid blocks of green, red, and blue.

Time always mattered in shipping, but now it matters more than ever, because American companies increasingly run on just-in-time schedules and carry very little inventory, relying on outside suppliers to get them the parts they need when they need them. These days, those suppliers tend to be across the sea, not down the street. Container ships make a six-thousand-mile, just-in-time supply chain possible. In a sense, they are immense floating warehouses; goods can be in transit and in storage at the same time. "Now no one has money tied up in spare parts, and no one carries inventory," Hansen said. "This is why. This ship *is* the inventory."

—James Surowiecki

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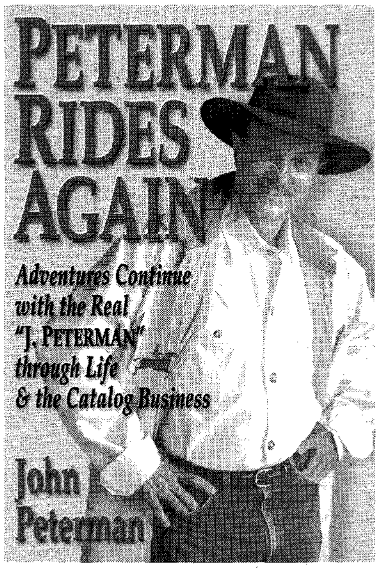
"As my boat sank into the Zambezi I watched all my luggage float downstream over Victoria Falls. But the day wasn't a total loss..."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ANNALS OF LAW

SHOTGUN EVICTION

Did New York's rent-control laws drive a landlord to murder?

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

When Louis Hubrecht, the owner of 700 Madison Avenue, and his longtime tenant Barbara Kenna were away from the building, they didn't attract much attention. She taught at a public elementary school on the Lower East Side, and he managed two properties—700 Madison and its neighbor, 698—and both had advanced into their sixties well sheltered by the city's anonymity. They had their eccentricities. Kenna toted a luggage cart everywhere, even to her job, at P.S. 2, on Henry Street. If she wore sandals in the wintertime, no one much cared; the children loved her. Hubrecht, who also lived at 700 Madison Avenue, was worth millions, thanks to his buildings, but he sometimes ate in church canteens. He had, apparently, an exquisite sensitivity to noise, even in normal conversation, and demanded that his tenants communicate with him only in writing.

Such quirks gave little hint of the feud that had simmered for decades in the building, a five-story row house situated on one of the most desirable blocks in Manhattan—on the west side of Madison Avenue between Sixty-second and Sixty-third Streets. For thirty-four years, Hubrecht and Kenna had lived almost side by side (she on the fifth floor, he on the second); they had, in a way, grown old together. Yet, for almost all that time, landlord and tenant exhibited a grinding, mutual hostility, based largely, it seems, on Kenna's belief that Hubrecht was slipping into her apartment and stealing her possessions. There were accusations, denials, threats, and finally, earlier this year, an eviction proceeding. The case was never resolved, however, because on the morning of Monday, September 11th, Hubrecht shot and killed Kenna on the landing outside his apartment. Later that day, he turned himself in to the police.

Still, Kenna got in a last word, after a fashion. After her death, an alarm went off in her apartment—a piercing buzz that could be heard all the way to the ground floor. Twenty-five days after the shooting, Hubrecht was released from Rikers Island on bail, but when he came home he was welcomed by the sound of Barbara Kenna's wailing alarm. Neither the police nor Kenna's relatives had managed to turn it off.

It may be a kind of civic grandiosity that prompts New Yorkers to invest notorious local events with metaphoric weight. Forty-one shots in a Bronx hallway offer a judgment of white policemen on alien turf. The rape of a jogger in Central Park speaks of a class of predatory urban youths. And the murder of a tenant by a landlord in the curious ecosystem of one Manhattan building evokes the perpetual state of war that exists in many landlord-tenant relationships. Real estate engages the passions of Americans, but Manhattan, with its disproportion between high demand for apartments and low supply of them, makes for a special type of tension. To a unique degree, New York introduces the heavy hand of the law into the relationship between landlord and tenant, and that, it turns out, may make matters worse. Indeed, one of the provocative questions raised by this crime is to what extent rent control contributed to Barbara Kenna's death.

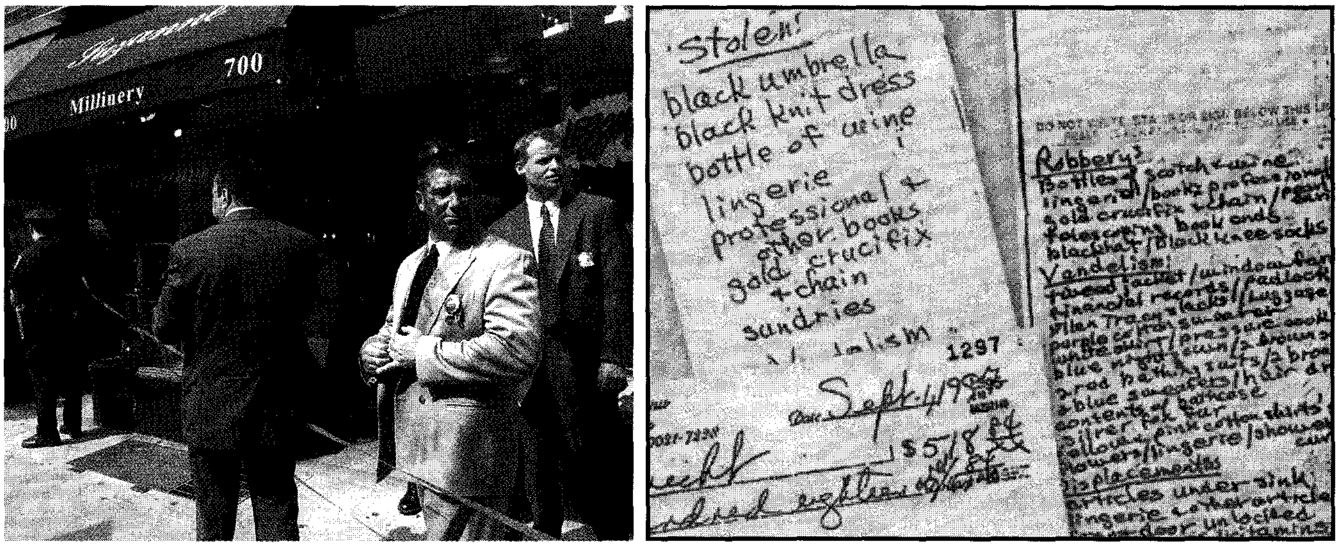
Considering the potential, there have been relatively few landlord-tenant murder cases in New York. (Oddly, there are no famous examples of tenants killing landlords.) In 1999, Alvin Weiss, also known as Mark Glass, pleaded guilty to hiring a hit man to kill some of his tenants in lower Manhattan, so that he could get higher rents for their apartments. The plot never came to fruition, and no one was hurt; Weiss was sentenced to a term of seven to fourteen years in prison. There is also the mysterious case of Camden Sylvia and Michael Sullivan, who were last seen near their Pearl Street loft on November 7, 1997. The couple vanished during a dispute with their landlord, Robert Rodriguez, who for months refused to answer questions from the police about the matter. After a lengthy investigation of his possible role in his tenants' disappearance, Rodriguez pleaded guilty last year to unrelated state and federal tax-evasion charges and is currently serving a twenty-three-month federal prison sentence. He will serve additional time for state convictions. Louis Hubrecht, charged with yielding to what may be a widely felt temptation, stands alone in the city's recent history.

Passersby rarely notice the building at 700 Madison Avenue. It was designed by J. H. Valentine as a single-family home and erected in 1879. Valentine, according to the architectural historian Christopher Gray, was "well known for designing rather boring brownstones." In about 1910, the city decided to widen some of its streets and ordered the removal of the graceful stairways in front of these buildings. "After the First World War, you didn't see any new building being built for the working class or the really wealthy on Madison Avenue," Gray says. "You saw only the upwardly striving class." Among them was Charles Pierre Hubrecht, who had emigrated from Alsace-Lorraine and made his living running a bookstore that specialized in French titles. Charles bought 700 Madison in the late nineteen-twenties and the building next to it, 698 Madison, in the early thirties. He and his wife, Hedwig, had five children: a son who died in early childhood, Alfred, Valerie, Louis, and Alice. The family lived at 700 Madison; three of the four children who reached adulthood, including Louis, who was born in 1934, spent most of their lives at 700 Madison, and none had children. According to Louis's sister Valerie Tresnowske, who married and moved uptown, "That building was Louis's whole life."

This part of Madison Avenue was once popular with European émigrés like the Hubrechts, but it long ago melded into the undifferentiated mass of affluence that is known today as the Upper East Side. As with the surrounding blocks, storefronts line 698 and 700 at ground level: Addison On Madison, a men's shirt-and-tie emporium; Nocturne, a sleepwear store; a women's clothier known as Leggiadro; and Suzanne Millinery, one of the last hatmakers in the city, where the hats start at several hundred dollars apiece. The second floor of each building also has a commercial tenant: Marimekko, the Finnish fabric-maker, and Rose Marie Roussel, a Parisian dressmaker. When one studies 700 Madison from the east side of the street, the only distinctive element is a small garret that was built on the roof, probably as servants' quarters, in 1900. For thirty-four years, that modest addition was the home of Barbara Kenna.

According to Paul Massey, a commercial real-estate agent on the Upper East Side, each of Louis Hubrecht's buildings, if vacant, would be worth about ten million dollars. Hubrecht himself, however, does not give an impression of great wealth. Now sixty-six, he has a long shock of white hair, which flops over his collar in the back, and his face has a pasty hue. He wears tattered sweaters and is said to dislike conversation, or even eye contact, not only with his tenants but with others as well. (His attorney would not permit an interview.) He spent most of his days puttering around his two buildings, and sometimes had supper in a church. Valerie Tresnowske says that Louis's personal life was limited to occasional visits to the Holiday Inn in Danbury, Connecticut. "They had socials for people forty and over," she told me. "You had to be there early to get the buffet dinner, and there was also a lot of dancing. You see, he didn't want to run into Miss Kenna. He figured Danbury was far enough away."

The Hubrecht family could not afford to maintain 698 or 700 Madison as a single-family home, so they rented out apartments. The lives of Kenna and the Hubrechts first intersected in 1966, when the family received an inquiry for the top-floor apartment from Kenna. Reared mostly in upstate New



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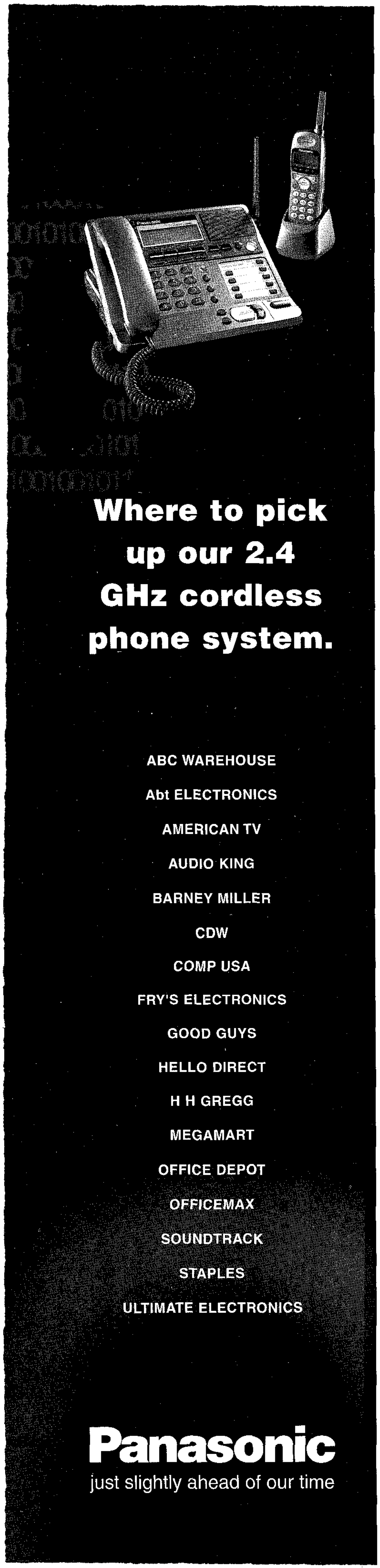
Police outside Louis Hubrecht's building; rent checks from his tenant Barbara Kenna. Their feud ended on the day that he killed her.

ANDREW SAVULICH/DAILY NEWS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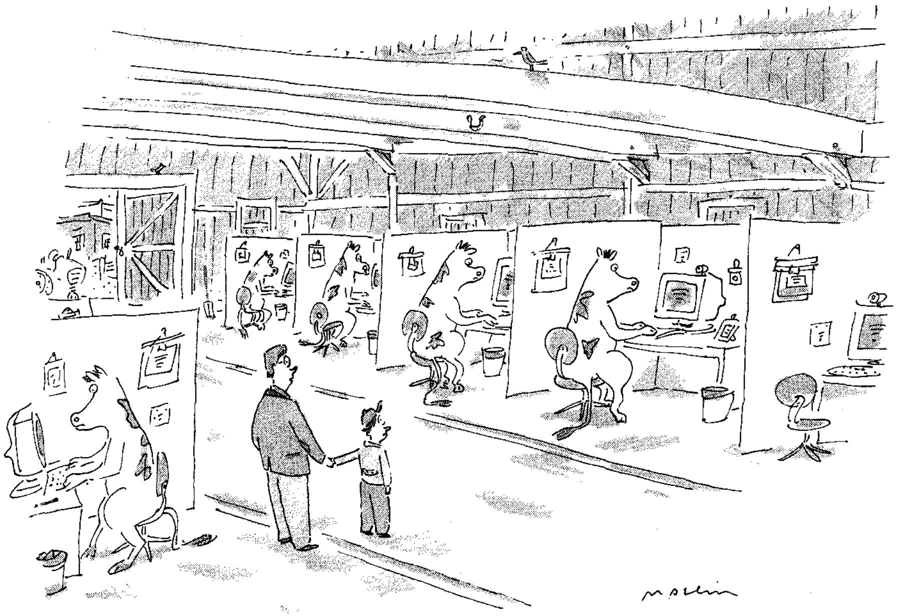
York, Kenna was then a young schoolteacher; a brief marriage had been annulled. "We didn't like to rent out that apartment, it was so small," Tresnowske told me. "But she was desperate. Nobody had ever lived in that apartment for more than a year, so we thought she would be gone soon."

But Kenna remained in the cramped apartment. About a year after Kenna moved in, Tresnowske recalls, "one day, out of the clear blue sky, she said to my older brother"—Alfred—"that he was going into her apartment. He had no idea what she was talking about, but that was the beginning." Kenna kept up these complaints about Alfred Hubrecht until his death, in 1974. She then began accusing Louis of entering her apartment and taking her belongings. In all, Kenna made these charges for more than thirty years.

At the time of Kenna's death, Hubrecht was charging her $586.44 per month, which was, according to real-estate agents in the area, about a quarter of what a similar apartment would fetch on the open market. The low rent was all that New York's rent-control law allowed, and, in other circumstances, what Kenna paid might be a motive for murder, so that she could be replaced with a higher-paying tenant. But it is clear that Hubrecht did not kill Kenna for her apartment. Over the years, as tenants moved out of his buildings, Hubrecht allowed their apartments to remain vacant. "My brother has been sick for a long time—hypertension, colon cancer last year—and he doesn't have the energy to care for people's apartments, so he just took care of the commercial tenants," Tresnowske told me. By the time of Kenna's death, there were no tenants in 698, which had six apartments; and, in 700, which had seven apartments, only four were occupied. Hubrecht lived in one and his sister Alice in another, Kenna lived in a third, and the fourth was occupied by a woman named Louise Duncan, who had lived there for more than twenty years.

Duncan, who has a slightly bigger studio than Kenna's, is the one relatively neutral party in the dispute that swirled around her. Unlike Kenna and Hubrecht, who led quiet lives, the slim, elegant Duncan is something of a woman about town—a former society columnist for the glossy magazine *Avenue*, an administrator for a theatre company, and now an aspiring playwright. Over the years, Duncan has had a chilly relationship with Hubrecht because of a range of familiar landlord-tenant issues. She thought the repairs he did were shoddy, and he once accused her of violating her lease by having a roommate.

At the same time, Duncan had a



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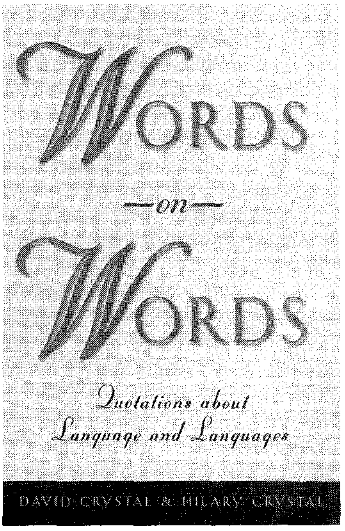
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fairly warm friendship with her upstairs neighbor, Barbara. "I saw Bobbi all the time on the stairway, and she was always very friendly and outgoing," Duncan told me. "But the one strange thing was that she would always say she thought Mr. Hubrecht was going into her apartment. And I never knew what she was talking about. I'd ask her why he would do such a thing and how he would get in. And she'd say, 'He has his ways. He knows people.' Well, one look at Mr. Hubrecht and you know that he didn't know anybody, but she'd always talk about it. That was why she started carrying that luggage cart. She decided that every time she went out she would have to take her important things with her. So she dragged them down to her school on the subway every day, so that he wouldn't steal them. On the subject of the landlord, Bobbi was crazy."

Duncan was out of town on the morning of Kenna's death, but it has been an unsettling experience. "I've never been through anything like this," she said. "I mean, I had no idea whether someone charged with second-degree murder could be released on bail." So she asked an ex-boyfriend, Claus von Bülow. "Unfortunately," he told her, "I do know the answer to that question."

For about five years in the early nineties, Duncan dated von Bülow, and he has provided her with a droll commentary on the Hubrecht matter. "I told Louise that America is the easiest country in the world to get out on bail in," von Bülow said when I reached him by telephone. "The one thing everyone wants to do historically is get to America, and bully for you. Precious few try and scamper the country." (Von Bülow, a native of Denmark who came here in 1966, moved to London in 1985, following his acquittal in a retrial on charges that he attempted to murder his American wife, Sunny.)

Duncan knew relatively little about the intensity of the feud between her landlord and her neighbor. Once, for example, around 1983, Kenna brought a legal action against Hubrecht in landlord-tenant court, claiming that he was entering her apartment and demanding that he stop. The records from the proceeding seem to have disappeared, but Hubrecht's lawyer, Stanley Seitel, never forgot the scene in the courtroom. "She brought a whole bunch of her schoolchildren to the courthouse," Seitel told me. "The judge was quite upset about it." Valerie Tresnowske, herself a public-school teacher who happened to be assigned to the same district as Kenna, remembered an odd postscript to the event. "Just after that," she said, "the district announced that you couldn't bring your class with you if you had to go to court." Kenna apparently dropped the complaint.

Why couldn't Kenna simply be evicted? New Yorkers will immediately know that the answer, once more, is rent control.

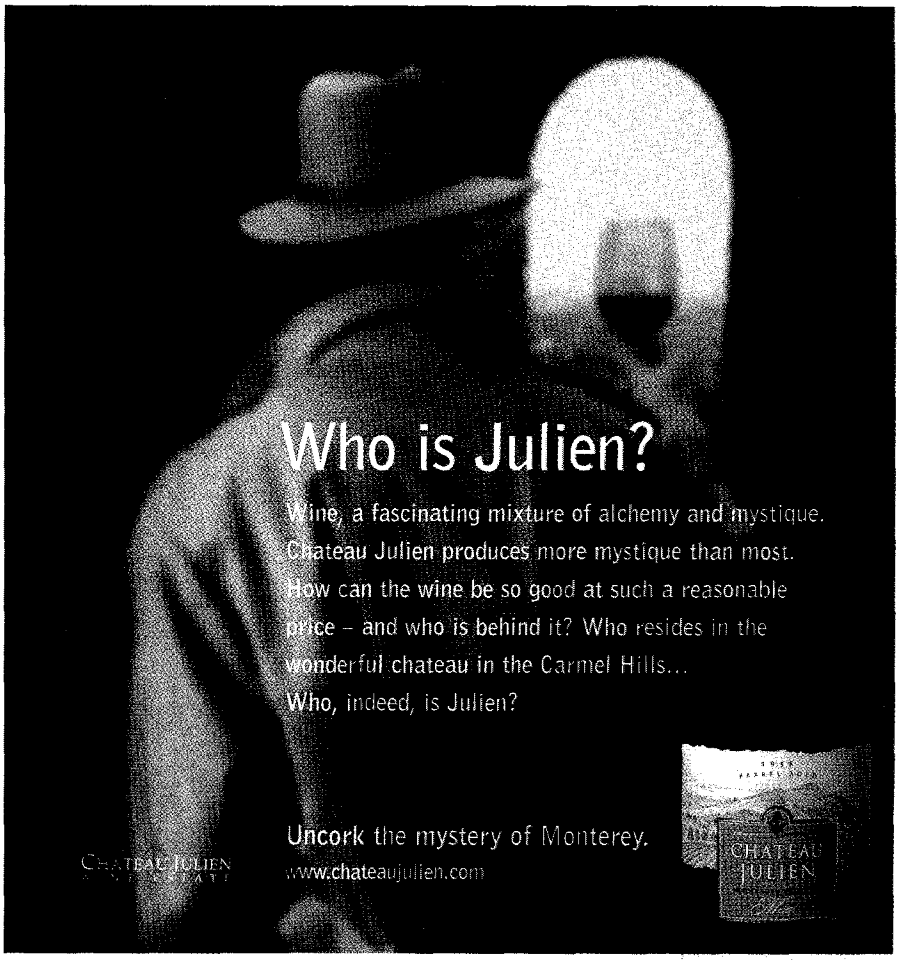
Rent control of New York apartments began during the Second World War. "What happened was that the government put in wartime price controls as an emergency measure," Michael Schill, a professor at the New York University School of Law, explained. "Most people agree that rent control makes a lot of sense during a war, because all the economic activity goes to making tanks, and no one builds housing." Lobbying by tenants has prolonged the "emergency," and turned this temporary wartime measure into a permanent part of New York law. Schill observes, "We're the only city in the world that can be in perpetual emergency. How can you possibly be in crisis for more than sixty years?"

In some ways, rent regulation has evolved over the years. The rent-control rules, which cover tenants, like Kenna, who moved into their apartments before 1971, have the most stringent restrictions on what landlords can charge. "Rent stabilization," which applies to newer tenants, imposes fewer limitations on landlords. But not all rental apartments in the city are covered by either rent control or rent stabilization. Certain small buildings, public housing, and some expensive apartments are exempted; in theory, tenants in high-rent apartments who earn more than $175,000 a year may be ineligible for the protection of rent regulation. According to the most recent figures, from 1999, of the city's two million rental units, rent control affects slightly more than fifty thousand apartments, and rent stabilization applies to more than half. In all, the law, particularly the formula for setting rent increases, is generally considered only slightly less complicated than the secret plans that Wen Ho Lee did not provide to the Chinese government.

Since the war, strict rent control has disappeared almost everywhere except a handful of communities in places like New Jersey and California, and, of course, in New York City. Besides restricting rents, rent control effectively gives tenants perpetual leases on their apartments. "If you're creating a nuisance, that's probably a violation of your lease," Schill says. "But it's very hard to evict a tenant on those types of grounds. The basic rule is, if you pay your rent, you can stay."

Barbara Kenna was meticulous about paying her rent. However, she used her rent checks as a forum in which to air her complaints. In a careful hand, she nearly covered the back of each check with accusations. For example, in May of this year, the back of her check said, "Sleep deprivation—on-going. Robbery: Tax forms & financial documents, newspapers, stamps, liquor, wine, gold crucifix . . . lingerie, special facial soap, band aids. VANDELISM: Ellen Tracy jacket, tweed jacket . . . purple cotton sweaters, luggage carts . . . garbage lids, sponges, hair brushes. DISPLACEMENTS: Valentine, articles under sink & throughout apt . . . camisols, blouses . . ."

Finally, earlier this year Hubrecht's sister Valerie wrote Kenna a letter. "For over thirty years you have unrelentingly gone to any extreme to harass and discredit my lovely family," Tresnowske wrote on March 16th. "One would think that by now you would be all worn out." The claim that her brother was entering Kenna's apartment, she wrote, "is utterly preposterous as he has no keys to your locks, nor does he want any." (Kenna had also installed an A.D.T. alarm system.) Tresnowske accused Kenna of harassing their mother, who died in 1983, "by waving a hammer in her face and throwing messy garbage in front of her door. On one of those occasions you pushed your way right into her apartment, hammer in hand, when luckily Mr. Hubrecht, who was in, intercepted and escorted you out." Tresnowske concluded her letter, which covered six pages, with an offer: four months of free rent, followed by Kenna's voluntary departure from the



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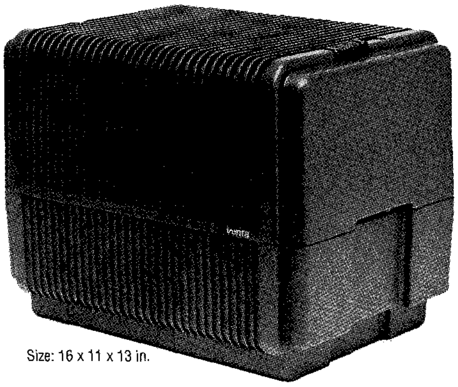

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building. Kenna did not respond. A month later, in April, Hubrecht hired an attorney, who initiated the long legal process that the landlord hoped would end with Kenna's eviction.

On the basis of the available evidence, it seems likely that Kenna's complaints about Hubrecht were a fantasy. Police officers at the Nineteenth Precinct apparently received calls from Kenna about the Hubrechts but were never able to substantiate her charges. As one person familiar with the police work in the complaints told me, precinct personnel regarded her as "a nut."

When Kenna was away from 700 Madison Avenue, she seems to have thrived. She was a theatre buff who enjoyed eating at Sardi's before shows. Until about ten years ago, she rode her bicycle all the way down to P.S. 2 and then carried it upstairs to her apartment. For teachers, P.S. 2 is regarded as an especially challenging assignment. Almost all the students are Asian, and many of them are new arrivals to the United States; some speak obscure Chinese dialects. Kenna taught third and fifth grades for many years, and had recently taken a job as a school librarian. "I'd be waiting to check out a book," one teacher told me, "and she'd make me wait while she would take the kids and serve them first. That's how she was with them." As another teacher put it, "She was always, no matter what was happening, unfailingly nice to the kids."

After school, Kenna often attended Mass at St. Teresa's Roman Catholic Church, across the street from P.S. 2. "She was a very devout Catholic," Monsignor Dennis Sullivan, the pastor of the church, said. "She was sort of an institution in the neighborhood. The Sunday after she died, a second grader said to me, 'Oh, she was my teacher,' and someone who was maybe forty-four, with tears in his eyes, said the same thing to me. She was revered and loved. She spent her life here on the Lower East Side, teaching the poor."

The dual portraits of the main characters—the meek landlord and the beloved tenant—make the events of September 11th especially poignant. The principal account comes from a videotaped statement that Hubrecht made to prosecutors after he turned himself in. According to people who are familiar with the tape, Hubrecht said that he was disturbed shortly after eight in the morning by the sound of Kenna's cart banging against his door. Hubrecht looked through his peephole and reached for his gun—a .38-calibre revolver, for which he had a license. When he opened the door, he saw Kenna holding a hammer. "I'm going to kill you," she said. Hubrecht then fired four to six shots at Kenna at point-blank range. The medical examiner's office reported that Kenna died of multiple gunshot wounds that penetrated all of her major organs. "He made no effort to close the door," Robert Frazer, the prosecutor in the case, said at Hubrecht's arraignment. "He made no effort to warn Ms. Kenna."

From the moment Hubrecht first spoke to the police, he has said that he acted in self-defense, and the hammer with which Kenna allegedly menaced him is likely to play a key role in the case. "Valerie Tresnowske's letter from earlier this year shows that Kenna had a history of threatening the Hubrecht family with hammers," Robert Gottlieb, Hubrecht's criminal-defense lawyer, says. "This shows that she did it again on September 11th." Prosecutors reject this claim. The prosecution asserts that Hubrecht planted the hammer beside Kenna. Investigators say that there are inconsistencies between what Hubrecht and his sister Alice, who was in the building at the time of the shooting, said about the location of the hammer and where it was found by the police.

An even bigger problem for the defense may be Hubrecht's behavior after the shooting. According to government sources, the landlord stepped around Kenna's body and then spent more than an hour collecting the trash in the building. "He waited an hour and

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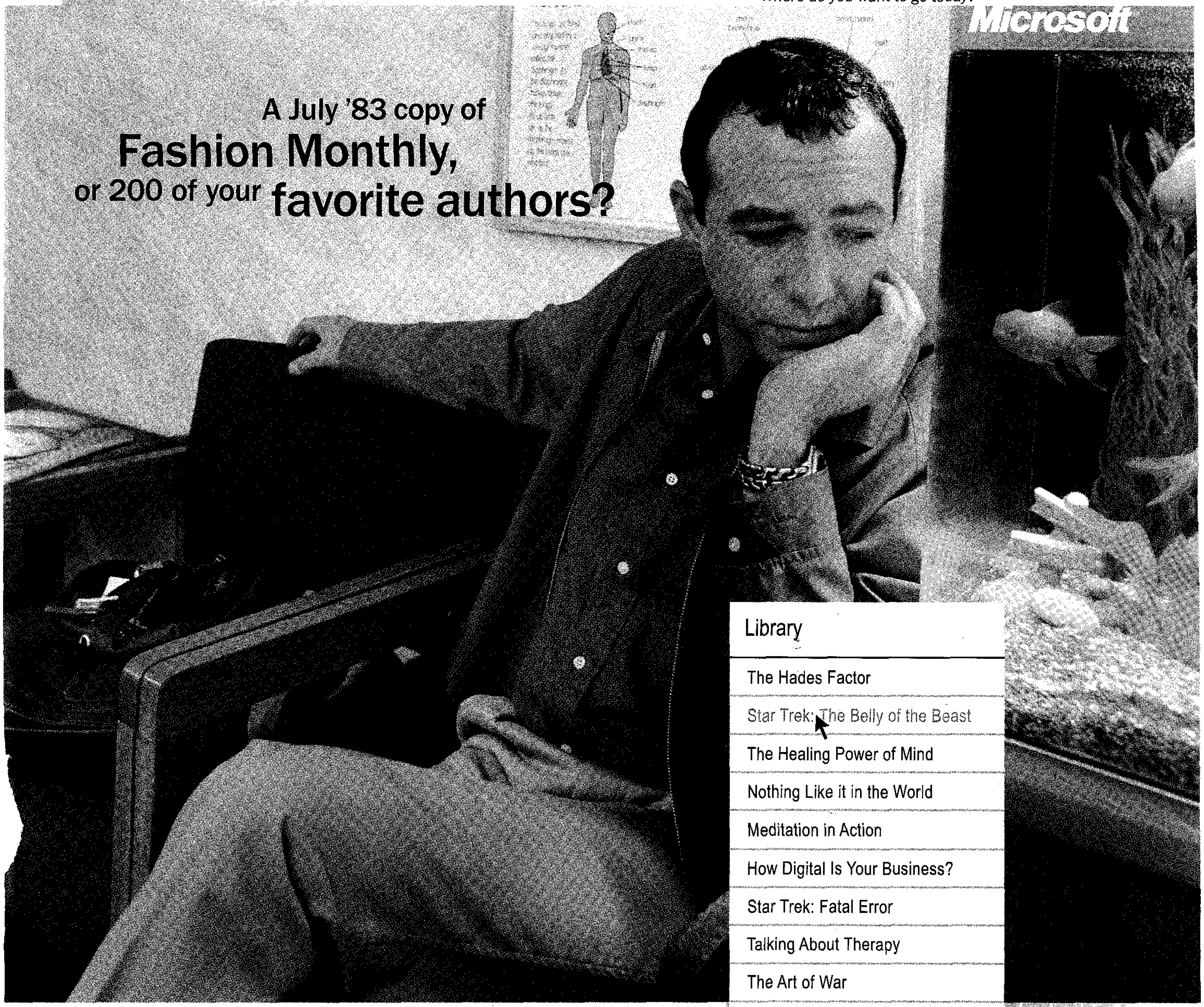

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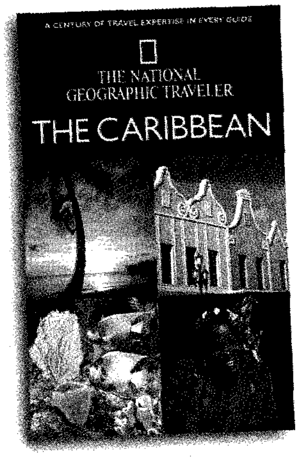
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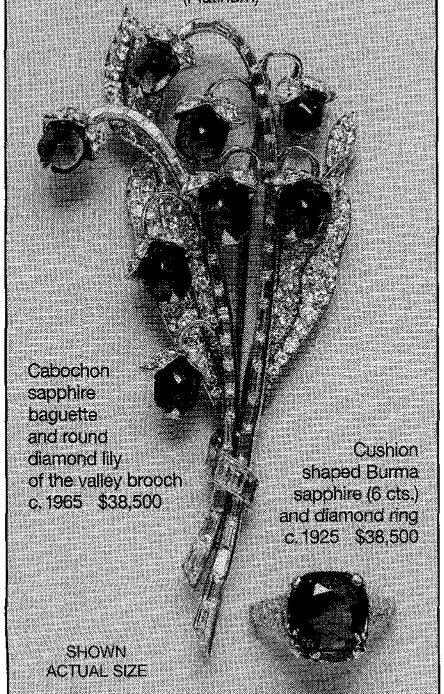
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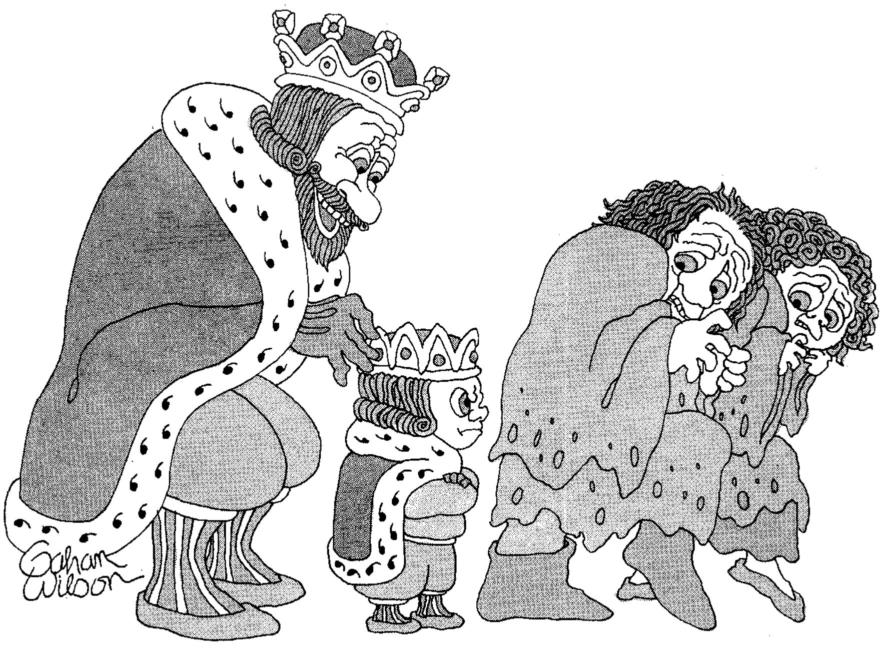


"Now you're getting the hang of it!"

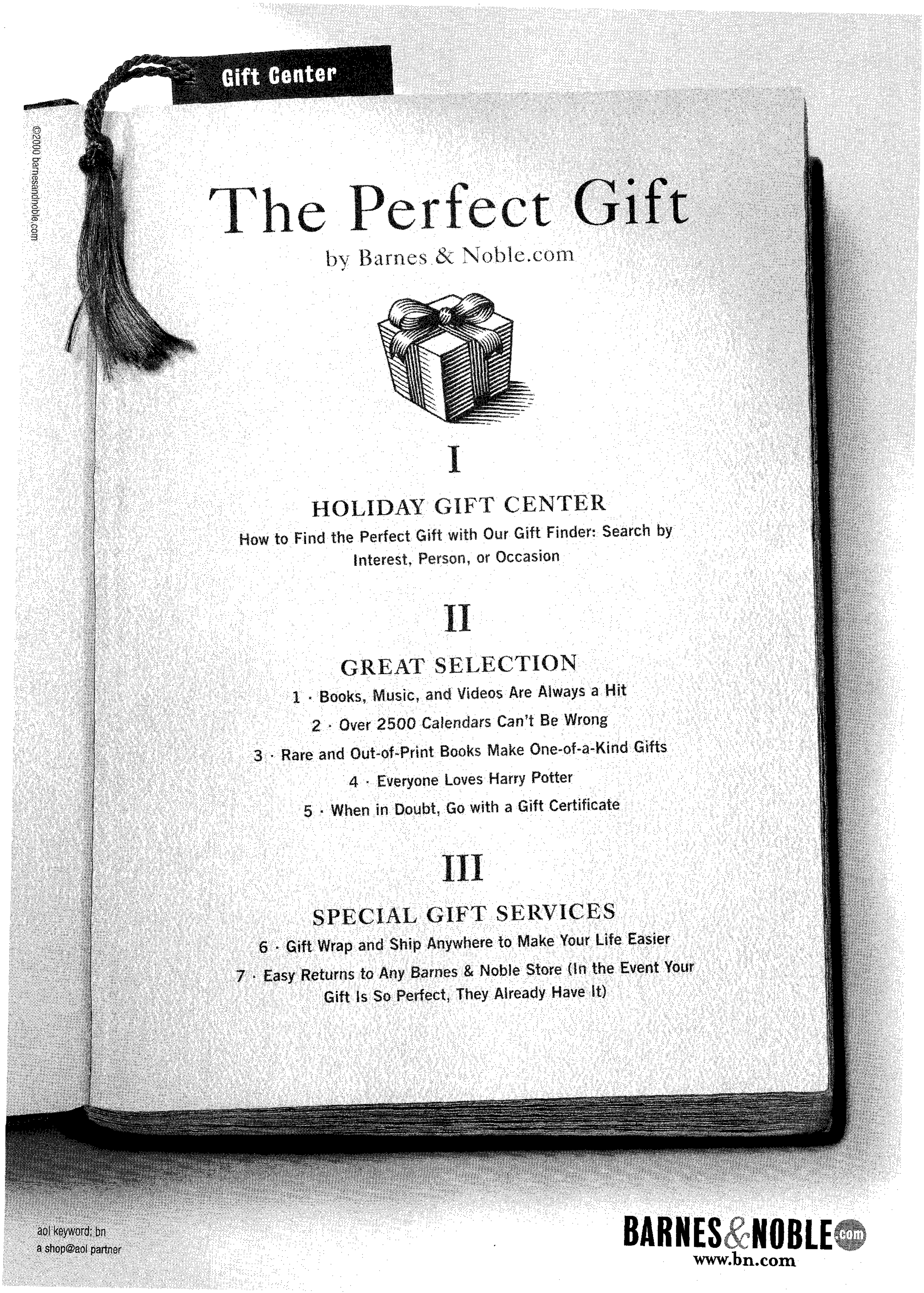
• •

twelve minutes from the time she was shot to call the police," Frazer said at a bail hearing for Hubrecht. "He left Ms. Kenna to die. This was a cold-blooded murder of a sixty-nine-year-old helpless woman." The defense appears likely to raise a sort of post-traumatic-stress defense for Hubrecht's failure to call the police. "He was so overwrought he didn't know what to do," Gottlieb says.

Shortly after Hubrecht's arrest, a grand jury in Manhattan indicted him on a charge of second-degree, or intentional, murder, which is punishable by up to life in prison. The prosecution urged that Hubrecht be held without bail, but, in light of his clean record and close ties to the community, Judge Herbert Adlerberg set a two-million-dollar cash bond. According to Louise Duncan, Claus von Bülow took note from London that his bond had been only a million dollars. "I hate to be upstaged," von Bülow said.

It seems likely that Kenna would be alive today if she and her landlord had managed, as it were, to get a legal separation—just what the New York rent laws make so difficult. Still, given Kenna's feelings for Hubrecht, it is fair to ask why she never chose to rid herself of this troublesome landlord. "I knew she had some kind of problem with her landlord, but she never wanted to move," Kenna's friend Lily Liu, who runs the after-school day-care center at P.S. 2, says. "She liked to go to Broadway, Off Broadway shows, Lincoln Center. She liked that area. She felt safe there." Another friend recalls saying to Kenna, "Bobbi, this thing with the landlord has taken over your life. Let it go." But she wanted to have her day in court. And, she said, "I like the address." Was convenience to the theatre, as well as low rent, worth what Kenna regarded as unending harassment? Did the feud itself serve some psychological need?

The question of Hubrecht's motivation will be at the center of his trial, which will probably begin early next year. A jury of Manhattan residents might well understand the depth of the bitterness underlying the relationship between landlord and tenant, and the extraordinary fact that rational people choose to live this way. In a moment of seeming lucidity, Barbara Kenna appears to have realized the strangeness of it all, too. After Kenna's death, Louise Duncan found her neighbor's last Christmas card, which had a mordant salutation: "Here's to another jolly year in Never-Never Land." ♦



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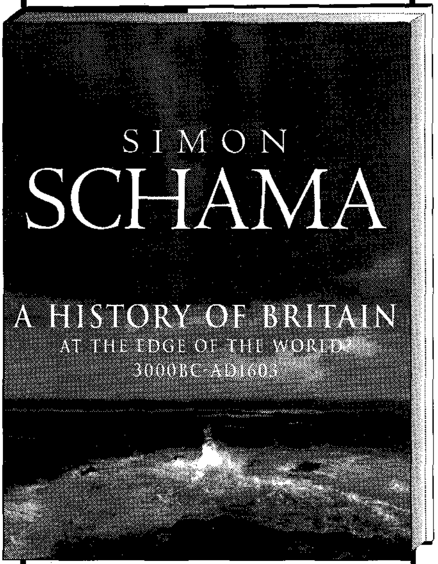

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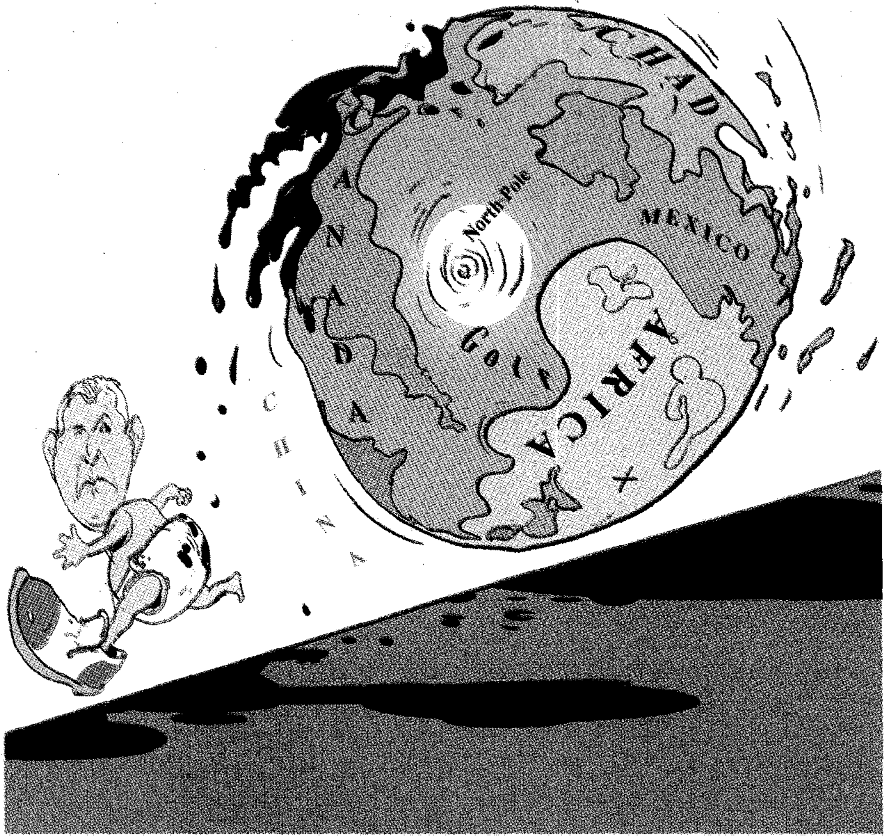

ISTVAN BANYAI

WASHINGTON—The White House said on Tuesday it would start daily national security and intelligence briefings for George W. Bush's team. . . . The offer to brief Bush, a Republican, was at the suggestion of Vice-President Al Gore.
—*Reuters, November 28, 2000*

EYES ONLY FOR THE PRESIDENT-ELECT (PRESUMPTIVE).

FROM: SAMUEL BERGER, NATIONAL-SECURITY ADVISER.

Here are some of the "hot" situations that we are currently tracking.

U.S.S. Cole Bombing: Our information is that this was the work of Muslim fundamentalists (not the same as Christian fundamentalists), on the orders of Osama "Bin" Laden. He hates your father, "Big" George, for making Saddam Hussein withdraw from Kuwait, a small country in the Gulf (not Mexico). C.I.A. reports he has sworn a personal holy war against you and has pledged to turn your Inaugural into "a blazing hell."

•

Mexico: Although generally associated with tacos and Margaritas—the beverage you used to enjoy while driving—Mexico is a potential source of burn aimed at the heart of the next President. According to C.I.A. intercepts of conversations between newly installed President Vicente "El" Fox and Canada's Prime Minister Chrétien (not "Cretin"), they both share the view that you are a mental "Lilliputian" (height-challenged person) and that the time is ripe for a joint Canadian-Mexican move against the U.S. On the plus side, Fox is impressed with your Spanish and says that it is even better than your English.

•

Cuba: C.I.A. reports that Fidel Castro—no relation to the pullout convertible sofa beds that you used to sleep on after too many Margaritas—is planning to lob leftover Russian missiles at Washington on the afternoon of January 20, 2001. (Note: This is the day you would become President in the event the democratic process fails.) On the plus side, if Russia's missiles are on a par with its submarines, you stand a fifty-fifty chance of surviving a Cuban thermonuclear first strike.

•

China: "Big" George was a sort of ambassador here while you were in B-school learning how to get his friends to invest in those "oil" wells. Ever since Mao, no one can remember the names of the Presidents, so just call him Mr. Chairman when he phones to bully you. (Our Beijing assets report that he, like all other world leaders with nuclear weapons, views you as a "nincompoop.") If Taiwan (not TIE-one-ON) comes up, change the subject by saying that we have intelligence—to sound with it, say "intel"—that the Russians are planning to invade Tibet (Tih-BET, where Richard Gere is from).

•

Balkans: Calm for now, but C.I.A., F.B.I., N.S.A., and Customs report that a Serbian suicide squad is already in the U.S., and is planning to hide inside the "Salute to C Students" float in your Inaugural parade.

Tomorrow's briefing will focus on a developing C.I.A. report that agents of Kim Jong Il are planning to kidnap you on the way to the Capitol, on January 20th, and force you to participate in a live televised spelling bee with ninth graders from St. Alban's School, Al Gore's alma mater. Have a nice day. ♦

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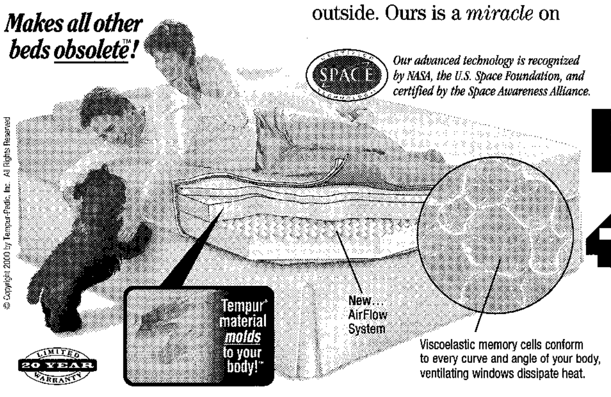
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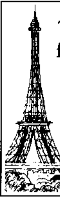

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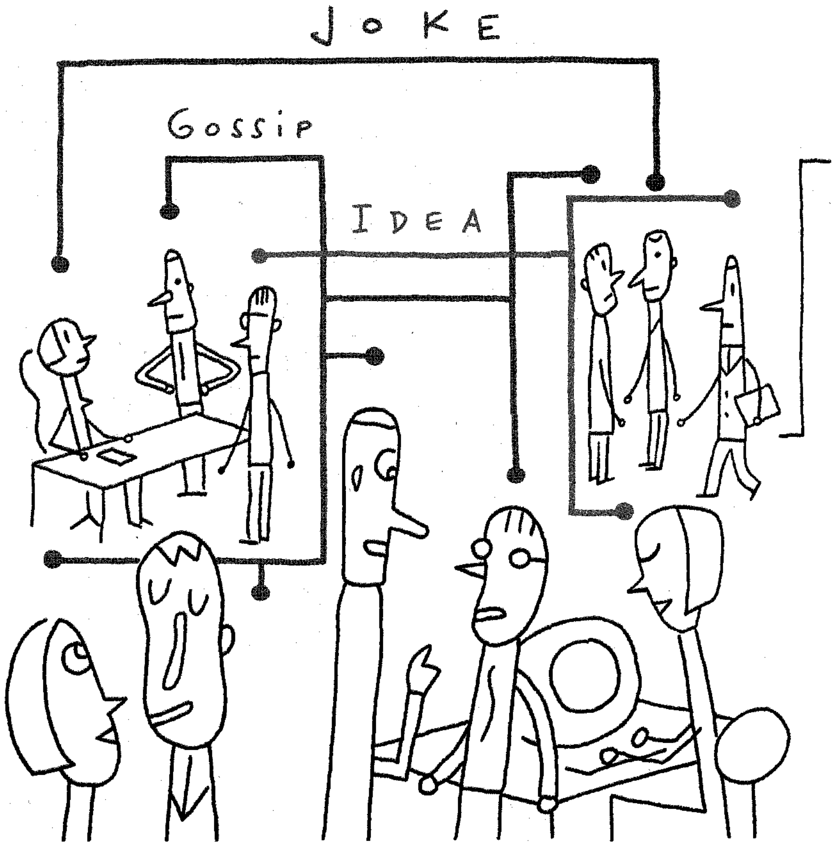
DEPT. OF HUMAN RESOURCES

DESIGNS FOR WORKING

Why your bosses want to turn your new office into Greenwich Village.

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

In the early nineteen-sixties, Jane Jacobs lived on Hudson Street, in Greenwich Village, near the intersection of Eighth Avenue and Bleecker Street. It was then, as now, a charming district of nineteenth-century tenements and town houses, bars and shops, laid out over an irregular grid, and Jacobs loved the neighborhood. In her 1961 masterpiece, "The Death and Life of Great American Cities," she rhapsodized about the White Horse Tavern down the block, home to Irish longshoremen and writers and intellectuals—a place where, on a winter's night, as "the doors open, a solid wave of conversation and animation surges out and hits you." Her Hudson Street had Mr. Slube, at the cigar store, and Mr. Lacey, the locksmith, and Bernie, the candy-store owner, who, in the course of a typical day, supervised the children crossing the street, lent an umbrella or a dollar to a customer, held on to some keys or packages for people in the neighborhood, and "lectured two youngsters who asked for cigarettes." The street had "bundles and packages, zigzagging from the drug store to the fruit stand and back over to the butcher's," and "teenagers, all dressed up, are pausing to ask if their slips show or their collars look right." It was, she said, an urban ballet.

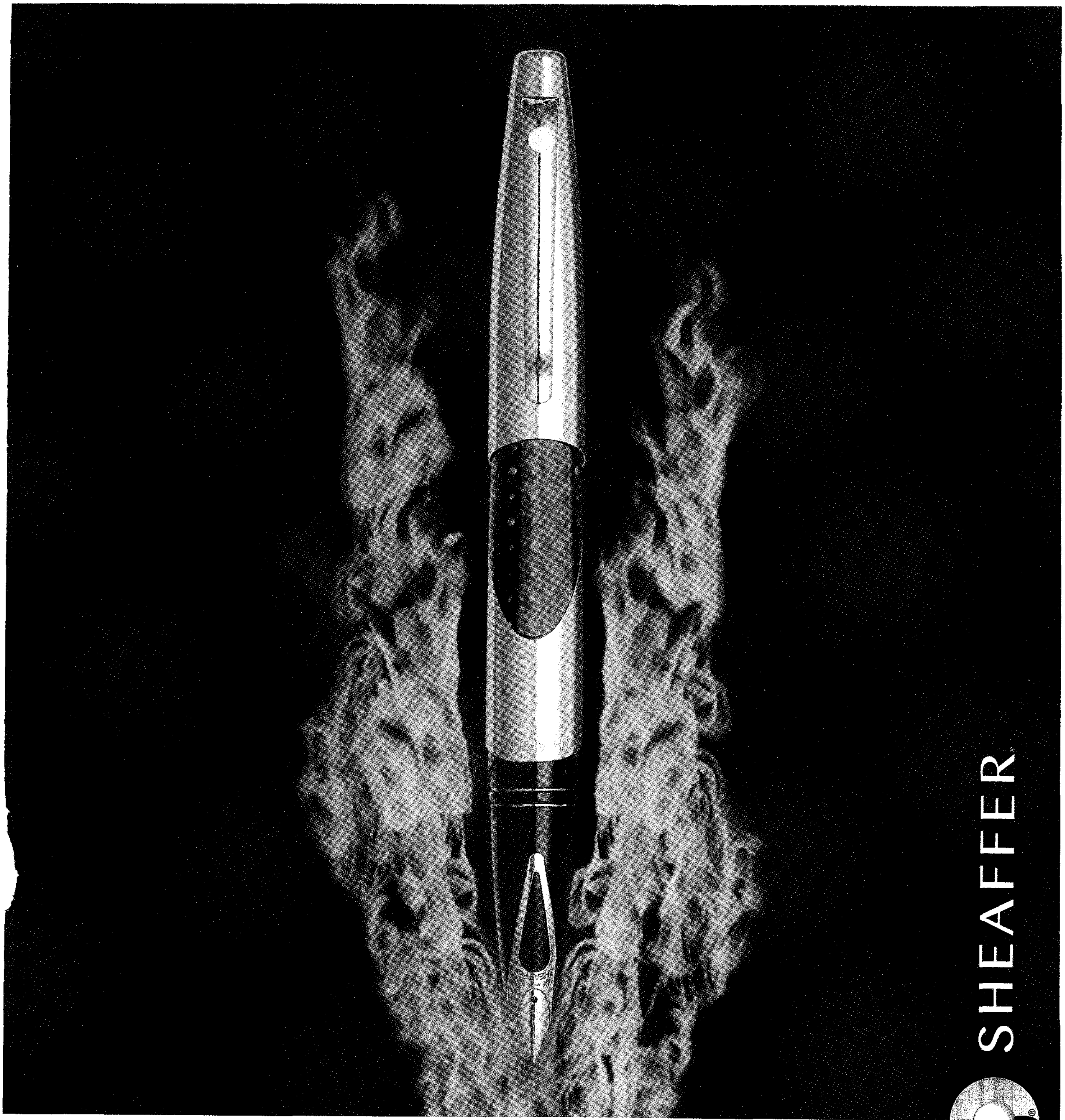


PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

The miracle of Hudson Street, according to Jacobs, was created by the particular configuration of the streets and buildings of the neighborhood. Jacobs argued that when a neighborhood is oriented toward the street, when sidewalks are used for socializing and play and commerce, the users of that street are transformed by the resulting stimulation: they form relationships and casual contacts they would never have otherwise. The West Village, she pointed out, was blessed with a mixture of houses and apartments and shops and offices and industry, which meant that there were always people "outdoors on different schedules and . . . in the place for different purposes." It had short blocks, and short blocks create the greatest variety in foot traffic. It had lots of old buildings, and old buildings have the low rents that permit individualized and creative uses. And, most of all, it had people, cheek by jowl, from every conceivable walk of life. Sparely populated suburbs may look appealing, she said, but without an active sidewalk life, without the frequent, serendipitous interactions of many different people, "there is no public acquaintanceship, no foundation of public trust, no cross-connections with the necessary people—and no practice or ease in applying the most ordinary techniques of city public life at lowly levels."

Jane Jacobs did not win the battle she set out to fight. The West Village remains an anomaly. Most developers did not want to build the kind of community Jacobs talked about, and most Americans didn't want to live in one. To reread "Death and Life" today, however, is to be struck by how the intervening years have given her arguments a new and unexpected relevance. Who, after all, has a direct interest in creating diverse, vital spaces that foster creativity and serendipity? Employers do. On the fortieth anniversary of its publication, "Death and Life" has been reborn as a primer on workplace design.

The parallels between neighborhoods and offices are striking. There was a time, for instance, when companies put their most valued employees in palatial offices, with potted plants in the corner, and secretaries out front, guarding access. Those offices were suburbs—gated communities, in fact—and many companies came to realize that if their best employees were isolated in suburbs they would be deprived of public acquaintanceship, the foundations of public trust, and cross-connections with the necessary people. In the eighties and early nineties, the fashion in corporate America was to follow what designers called "universal planning"—rows of identical cubicles, which resembled nothing so much as a Levittown. Today, universal planning has fallen out of favor, for the same reason



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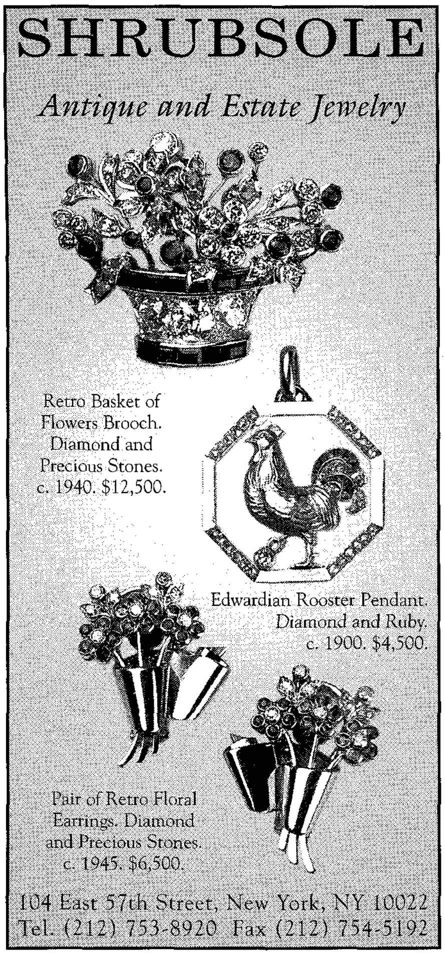

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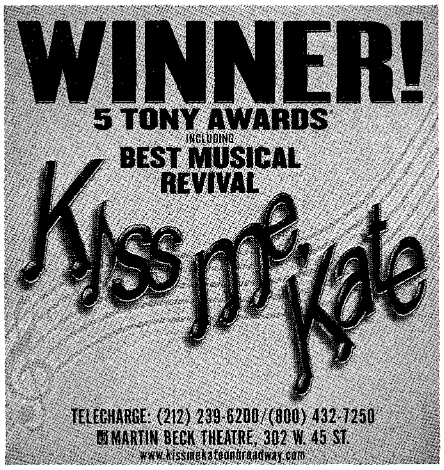

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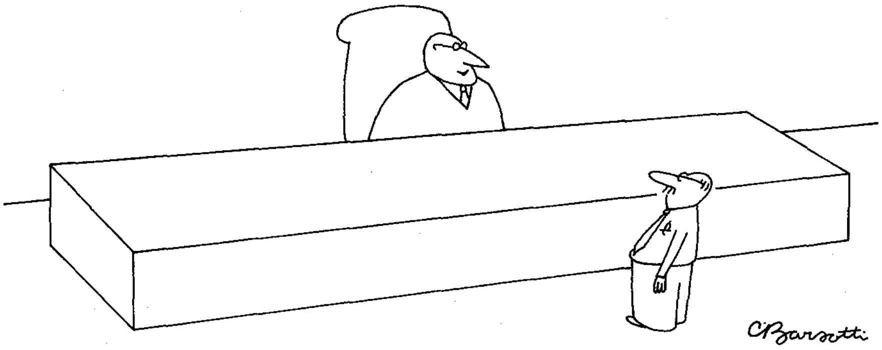

"Life isn't fair, Milford, and that's what makes it fun."

• •

that the postwar suburbs like Levittown did: to thrive, an office space must have a diversity of uses—it must have the workplace equivalent of houses and apartments and shops and industry.

If you visit the technology companies of Silicon Valley, or the media companies of Manhattan, or any of the firms that self-consciously identify themselves with the New Economy, you'll find that secluded private offices have been replaced by busy public spaces, open-plan areas without walls, executives next to the newest hires. The hush of the traditional office has been supplanted by something much closer to the noisy, bustling ballet of Hudson Street. Forty years ago, people lived in neighborhoods like the West Village and went to work in the equivalent of suburbs. Now, in one of the odd reversals that mark the current economy, they live in suburbs and, increasingly, go to work in the equivalent of the West Village.

The office used to be imagined as a place where employees punch clocks and bosses roam the halls like high-school principals, looking for miscreants. But when employees sit chained to their desks, quietly and industriously going about their business, an office is not functioning as it should. That's because innovation—the heart of the knowledge economy—is fundamentally social. Ideas arise as much out of casual conversations as they do out of formal meetings. More precisely, as one study after another has demonstrated, the best ideas in any workplace arise out of casual contacts among different groups within the same company. If you are designing widgets for Acme.com, for instance, it is unlikely that a breakthrough idea is going to come from someone else on the widget team: after all, the other team members are as blinkered by the day-to-day demands of dealing with the existing product as you are. Someone from outside Acme.com—your old engineering professor, or a guy you used to work with at Apex.com—isn't going to be that helpful, either. A person like that doesn't know enough about Acme's widgets to have a truly useful idea. The most useful insights are likely to come from someone in customer service, who hears firsthand what widget customers have to say, or from someone in marketing, who has wrestled with the problem of how to explain widgets to new users, or from someone who used to work on widgets a few years back and whose work on another Acme product has given him a fresh perspective. Innovation comes from the interactions of people at a comfortable distance from one another, neither too close nor too far. This is why—quite apart from the matter of logistics and efficiency—companies have offices to begin with. They go to the trouble of gathering their employees under one roof because they want the widget designers to bump into the people in marketing and the people in customer service and the guy who moved to another department a few years back.

The catch is that getting people in an office to bump into people from another department is not so easy as it looks. In the sixties and seventies, a researcher at M.I.T. named Thomas Allen conducted a decade-long study of the way in which engineers communicated in research-and-development laboratories. Allen found that the likelihood that any two people will communicate drops off dramatically as the distance between their

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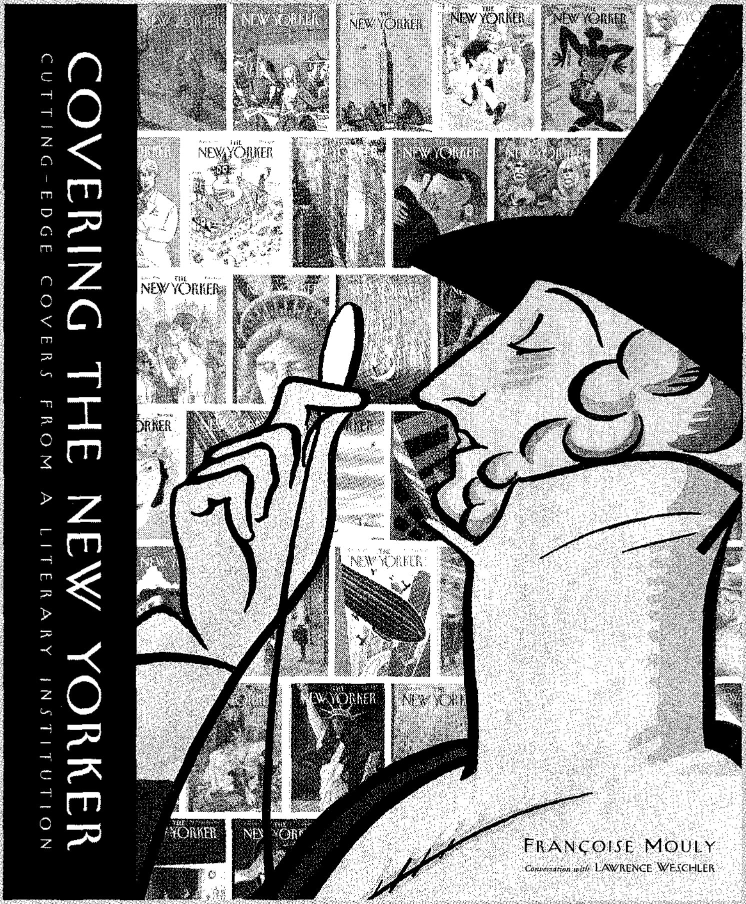
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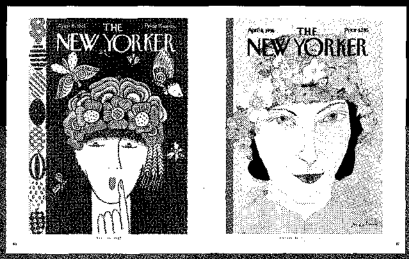
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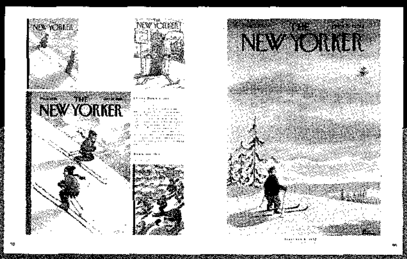
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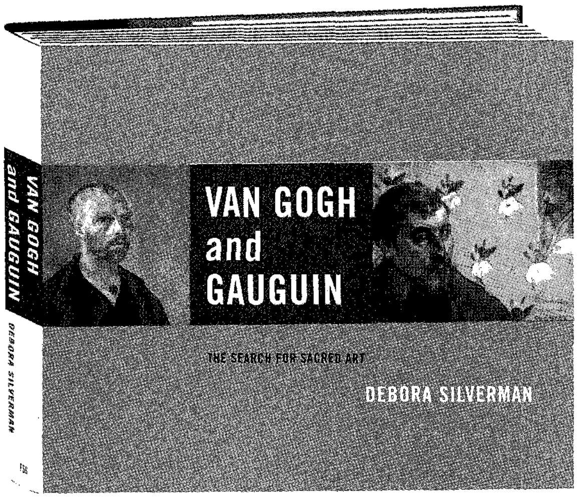

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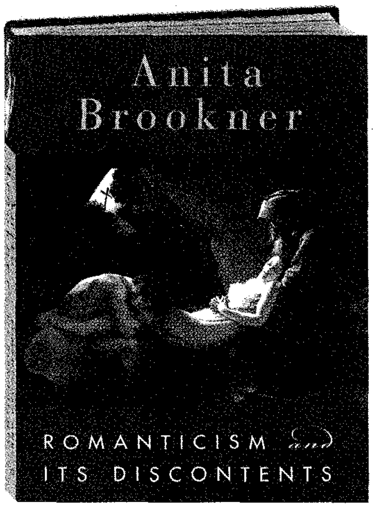

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desks increases: we are four times as likely to communicate with someone who sits six feet away from us as we are with someone who sits sixty feet away. And people seated more than seventy-five feet apart hardly talk at all.

Allen's second finding was even more disturbing. When the engineers weren't talking to those in their immediate vicinity, many of them spent their time talking to people *outside* their company—to their old computer-science professor or the guy they used to work with at Apple. He concluded that it was actually easier to make the outside call than to walk across the room. If you constantly ask for advice or guidance from people inside your organization, after all, you risk losing prestige. Your colleagues might think you are incompetent. The people you keep asking for advice might get annoyed at you. Calling an outsider avoids these problems. "The engineer can easily excuse his lack of knowledge by pretending to be an 'expert in something else' who needs some help in 'broadening into this new area,' " Allen wrote. He did his study in the days before E-mail and the Internet, but the advent of digital communication has made these problems worse. Allen's engineers were far too willing to go outside the company for advice and new ideas. E-mail makes it even easier to talk to people outside the company.

The task of the office, then, is to invite a particular kind of social interaction—the casual, nonthreatening encounter that makes it easy for relative strangers to talk to each other. Offices need the sort of social milieu that Jane Jacobs found on the sidewalks of the West Village. "It is possible in a city street neighborhood to know all kinds of people without unwelcome entanglements, without boredom, necessity for excuses, explanations, fears of giving offense, embarrassments respecting impositions or commitments, and all such paraphernalia of obligations which can accompany less limited relationships," Jacobs wrote. If you substitute "office" for "city street neighborhood," that sentence becomes the perfect statement of what the modern employer wants from the workplace.

Imagine a classic big-city office tower, with a floor plate of a hundred and eighty feet by a hundred and eighty feet. The center part of every floor is given over to the guts of the building: elevators, bathrooms, electrical and plumbing systems. Around the core are cubicles and interior offices, for support staff and lower management. And around the edges of the floor, against the windows, are rows of offices for senior staff, each room perhaps two hundred or two hundred and fifty square feet. The best research about office communication tells us that there is almost no worse way to lay out an office. The executive in one corner office will seldom bump into any other executive in a corner office. Indeed, stringing the exterior offices out along the windows guarantees that there will be very few people within the critical sixty-foot radius of those offices. To maximize the amount of contact among employees, you really ought to put the most valuable staff members in the center of the room, where the highest number of people can be within their orbit. Or, even better, put all places where people tend to congregate—the public areas—in the center, so they can draw from as many disparate parts of the company as possible. Is it any wonder that creative firms often prefer loft-style buildings, which have usable centers?

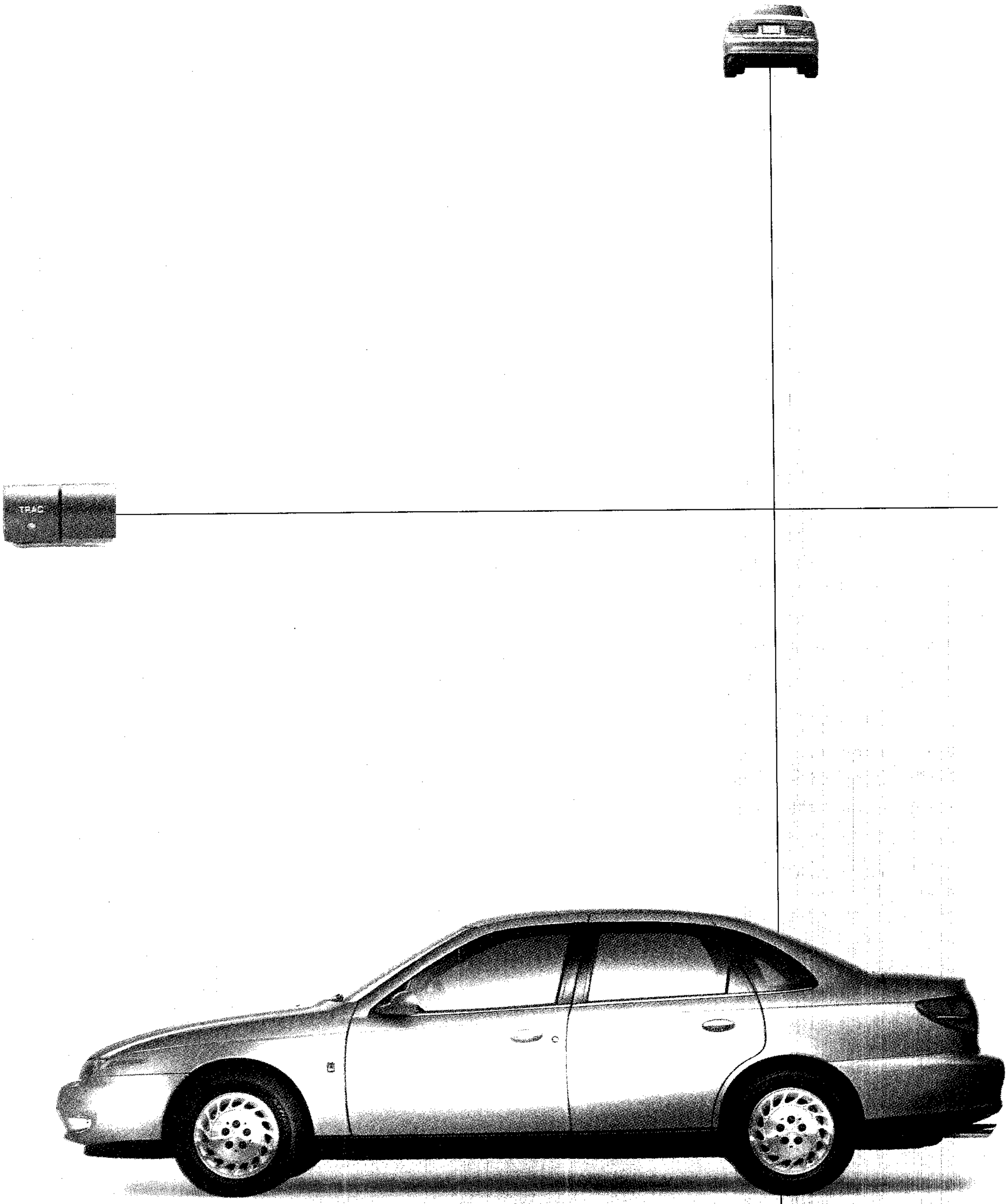
Another way to increase communication is to have as few private offices as possible. The idea is to exchange private space for public space, just as in the West Village, where residents agree to live in tiny apartments in exchange for a wealth of nearby cafés and stores and bars and parks. The West Village forces its residents outdoors. Few people, for example, have a washer and dryer in their apartment, and so even laundry is necessarily a social event: you have to take your clothes to the laundromat down the street. In the office equivalent, designers force employees to move around, too. They build in "functional inefficiencies"; they put kitchens and copiers and printers and libraries in places that can be reached only by a circuitous journey.

A more direct approach is to create an office so flexible that the kinds of people who need to spontaneously interact can actually be brought together. For example, the Ford Motor Company, along with a group of researchers from the University of Michigan, recently conducted a pilot project on the effectiveness of "war rooms" in software development. Previously, someone inside the company who needed a new piece of software written would have a series of meetings with the company's programmers, and the client and the programmers would send messages back and forth. In the war-room study, the company moved the client, the programmers, and a manager into a dedicated conference room, and made them stay there until the project was done. Using the war room cut the software-development time by two-thirds, in part because there was far less time wasted on formal meetings or calls outside the building: the people who ought to have been bumping into each other were now sitting next to each other.

Two years ago, the advertising agency TBWA\Chiat\Day moved into new offices in Los Angeles, out near the airport. In the preceding years, the firm had been engaged in a radical, and in some ways disastrous, experiment with a "nonterritorial" office: no one had a desk or any office equipment of his own. It was a scheme that courted failure by neglecting all the ways in which an office is a sort of neighborhood. By contrast, the new office is an almost perfect embodiment of Jacobsian principles of community. The agency is in a huge old warehouse, three stories high and the size of three football fields. It is informally known as Advertising City, and that's what it is: a kind of artfully constructed urban neighborhood. The floor is bisected by a central corridor called Main Street, and in the center of the room is an open space, with café tables and a stand of ficus trees, called Central Park. There's a basketball court, a game room, and a bar. Most of the employees are in snug workstations known as nests, and the nests are grouped together in neighborhoods that radiate from Main Street like Paris arrondissements. The top executives are situated in the middle of the room. The desk belonging to the chairman and creative director of the company looks out on Central Park. The offices of the chief financial officer and the media director abut the basketball court. Sprinkled throughout the building are meeting rooms and project areas and plenty of nooks where employees can closet themselves when they need to. A small part of the building is elevated above the main floor on a mezzanine, and if you stand there and watch the people wander about with their portable phones, and sit and chat in Central Park, and play basketball in the gym, and you feel on your shoulders the sun from the skylights and listen to the gentle buzz of human activity, it is quite possible to forget that you are looking at an office.

In "The Death and Life of Great American Cities," Jacobs wrote of the importance of what she called "public characters"—people who have the so-

"They're bred for their facial characteristics."



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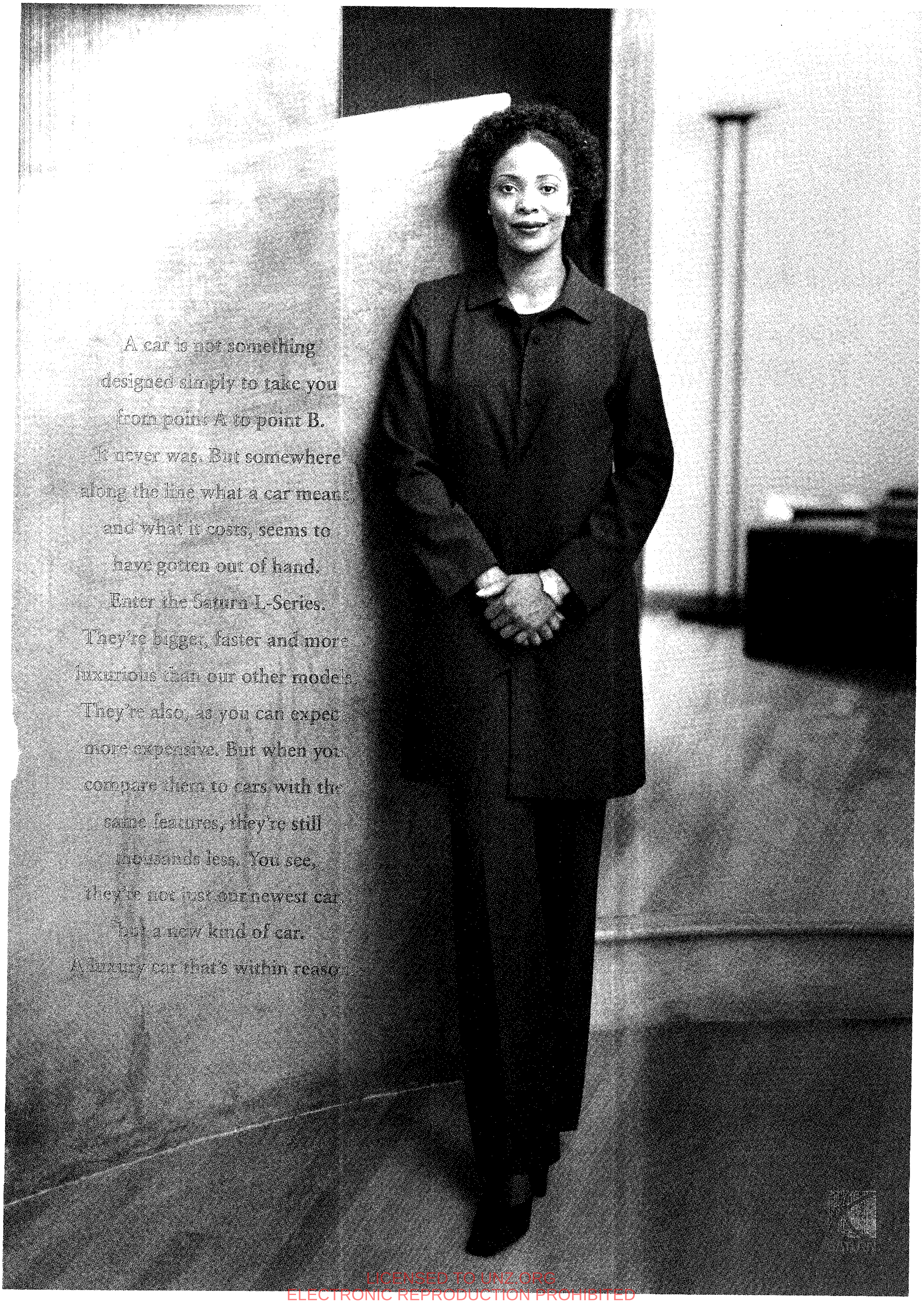

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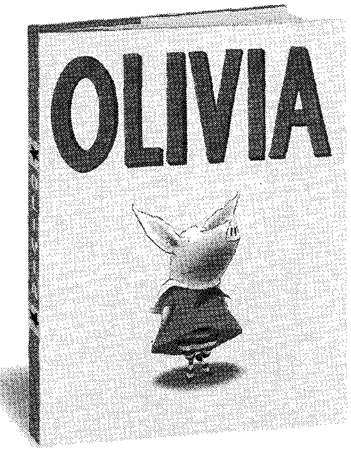

OLIVIA
by Ian Falconer

Meet Olivia, the irrepressible but irresistible little pig in Ian Falconer's highly praised first book. Whether it's getting dressed for the day or going on a trip with her mother to the museum, Olivia adds her own special flair to everything she does. (Atheneum)

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cial position and skills to orchestrate the movement of information and the creation of bonds of trust:

> A public character is anyone who is in frequent contact with a wide circle of people and who is sufficiently interested to make himself a public character. . . . The director of a settlement on New York's Lower East Side, as an example, makes a regular round of stores. He learns from the cleaner who does his suits about the presence of dope pushers in the neighborhood. He learns from the grocer that the Dragons are working up to something and need attention. He learns from the candy store that two girls are agitating the Sportsmen toward a rumble. One of his most important information spots is an unused breadbox on Rivington Street. . . . A message spoken there for any teen-ager within many blocks will reach his ears unerringly and surprisingly quickly, and the opposite flow along the grapevine similarly brings news quickly in to the breadbox.

A vital community, in Jacobs's view, required more than the appropriate physical environment. It also required a certain kind of person, who could bind together the varied elements of street life. Offices are no different. In fact, as office designers have attempted to create more vital workplaces, they have become increasingly interested in identifying and encouraging public characters.

One of the pioneers in this way of analyzing offices is Karen Stephenson, a business-school professor and anthropologist who runs a New York-based consulting company called Netform. Stephenson studies social networks. She goes into a company—her clients include J. P. Morgan, the Los Angeles Police Department, T.R.W., and I.B.M.—and distributes a questionnaire to its employees, asking about which people they have contact with. Whom do you like to spend time with? Whom do you talk to about new ideas? Where do you go to get expert advice? Every name in the company becomes a dot on a graph, and Stephenson draws lines between all those who have regular contact with each other. Stephenson likens her graphs to X-rays, and her role to that of a radiologist. What she's depicting is the firm's invisible inner mechanisms, the relationships and networks and patterns of trust that arise as people work together over time, and that are hidden beneath the organization chart. Once, for example, Stephenson was doing an "X-ray" of a Head Start organization. The agency was mostly female, and when Stephenson analyzed her networks she found that new hires and male staffers were profoundly isolated, communicating with the rest of the organization through only a handful of women. "I looked at tenure in the organization, office ties, demographic data. I couldn't see what tied the women together, and why the men were talking only to these women," Stephenson recalls. "Nor could the president of the organization. She gave me a couple of ideas. She said, 'Sorry I can't figure it out.' Finally, she asked me to read the names again, and I could hear her stop, and she said, 'My God, I know what it is. All those women are smokers.' " The X-ray revealed that the men—locked out of the formal power structure of the organization—were trying to gain access and influence by hanging out in the smoking area with some of the more senior women.

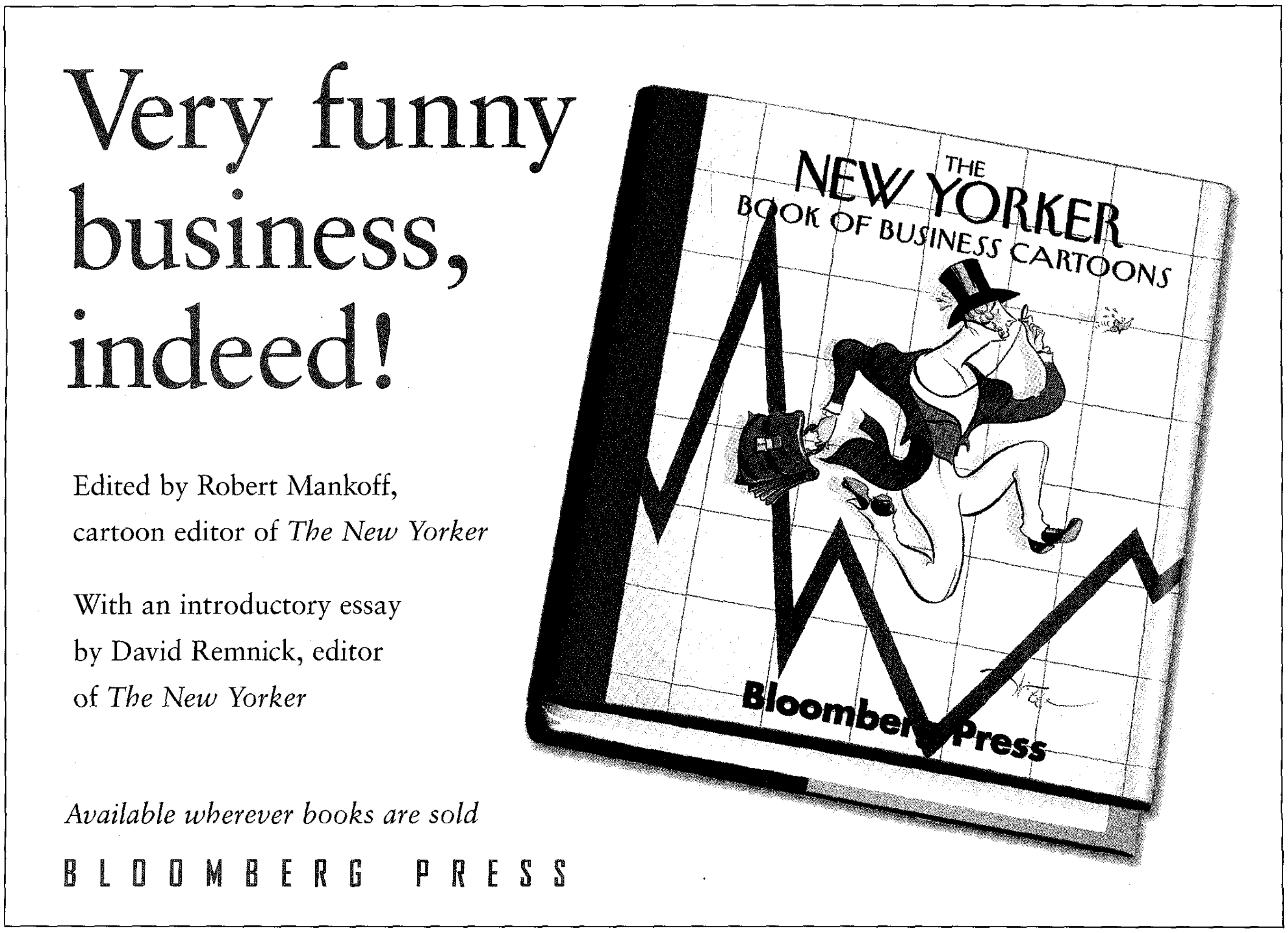
What Stephenson's X-rays do best, though, is tell you who the public characters are. In every network, there are always one or two people who have connections to many more people than anyone else. Stephenson calls them "hubs," and on her charts lines radiate out from them like spokes on a wheel. (Bernie the candy-store owner, on Jacobs's Hudson Street, was a hub.) A few people are also what Stephenson calls "gatekeepers": they control access to critical people, and link together a strategic few disparate groups. Finally, if you analyze the graphs there are always people who seem to have lots of indirect links to other people—who are part of all sorts of networks without necessarily being in the center of them. Stephenson calls those people "pulsetakers." (In Silicon Valleyspeak, the person in a sea of cubicles who pops his or her head up over the partition every time something interesting is going on is called a prairie dog: prairie dogs are pulsetakers.)

In the past year, Stephenson has embarked on a partnership with Steelcase, the world's largest manufacturer of office furniture, in order to use her techniques in the design of offices. Traditionally, office designers would tell a company what furniture should go where. Stephenson and her partners at Steelcase propose to tell a company what people should go where, too. At Steelcase, they call this "floor-casting."

One of the first projects for the group

is the executive level at Steelcase's headquarters, a five-story building in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The executive level, on the fourth floor, is a large, open room filled with small workstations. (Jim Hackett, the head of the company, occupies what Steelcase calls a Personal Harbor, a black, freestanding metal module that may be—at seven feet by eight—the smallest office of a Fortune 500 C.E.O.) One afternoon recently, Stephenson pulled out a laptop and demonstrated how she had mapped the communication networks of the leadership group onto a seating chart of the fourth floor. The dots and swirls are strangely compelling—abstract representations of something real and immediate. One executive, close to Hackett, was inundated with lines from every direction. "He's a hub, a gatekeeper, and a pulsetaker across all sorts of different dimensions," Stephenson said. "What that tells you is that he is very strategic. If there is no succession planning around that person, you have got a huge risk to the knowledge base of this company. If he's in a plane accident, there goes your knowledge." She pointed to another part of the floor plan, with its own thick overlay of lines. "That's sales and marketing. They have a pocket of real innovation here. The guy who runs it is very good, very smart." But then she pointed to the lines connecting that department with other departments. "They're all coming into this one place," she said, and she showed how all the lines coming out of marketing converged on one senior executive. "There's very little path redundancy. In human systems, you need redundancy, you need communication across multiple paths." What concerned Stephenson wasn't just the lack of redundancy but the fact that, in her lingo, many of the paths were "unconfirmed": they went only one way. People in marketing were saying that they communicated with the senior management, but there weren't as many lines going in the other direction. The sales-and-marketing team, she explained, had somehow become isolated from senior management. They couldn't get their voices heard when it came to innovation—and that fact, she said, ought to be a big consideration when it comes time to redo the office. "If you ask the guy who heads sales and marketing who he wants to sit next to, he'll pick out all the people he trusts," she said. "But do you sit him with those people? No. What you want to do is put people who don't trust each other near each other. Not necessarily next to each other, because they get too close. But close enough so that when you pop your head up, you get to see people, they are in your path, and all of a sudden you build an inviting space where they can hang out, kitchens and things like that. Maybe they need to take a hub in an innovation network and place the person with a pulsetaker in an expert network—to get that knowledge indirectly communicated to a lot of people."

The work of translating Stephenson's insights onto a new floor plan is being done in a small conference room—a



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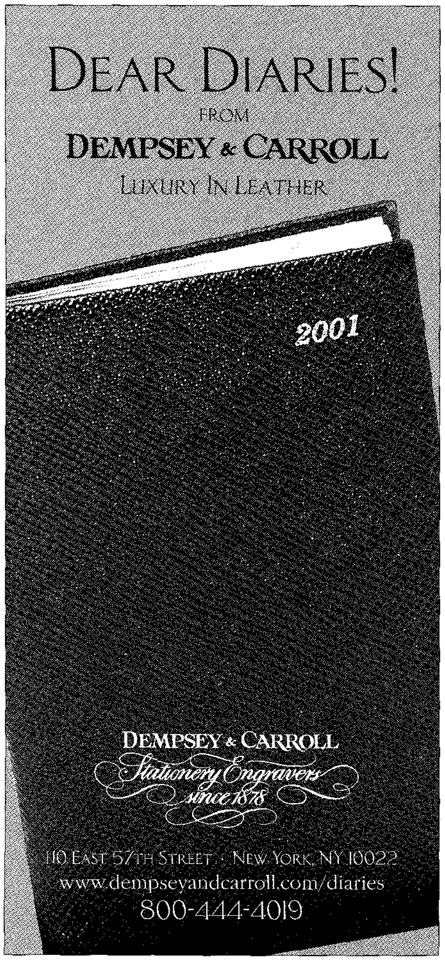
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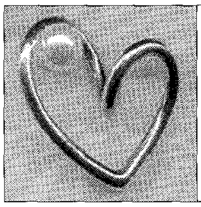
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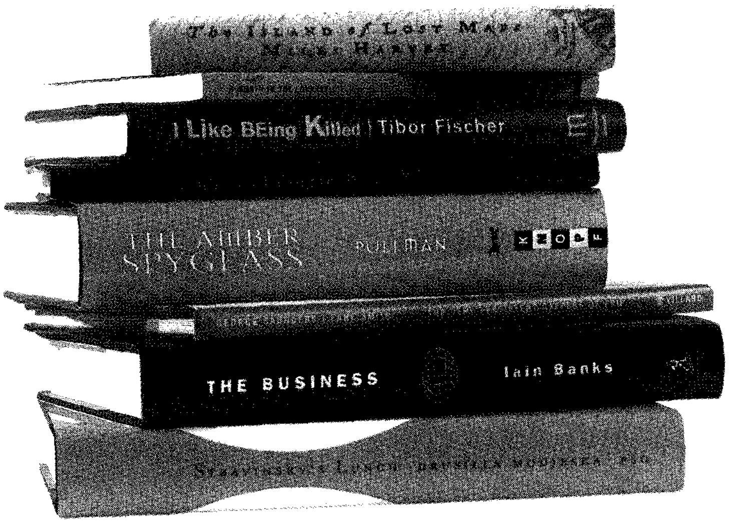
war room—on the second floor of Steelcase headquarters. The group consists of a few key people from different parts of the firm, such as human resources, design, technology, and space-planning research. The walls of the room are cluttered with diagrams and pictures and calculations and huge, blowup versions of Stephenson's X-rays. Team members stress that what they are doing is experimental. They don't know yet how directly they want to translate findings from the communications networks to office plans. After all, you don't want to have to redo the entire office every time someone leaves or joins the company. But it's clear that there are some very simple principles from the study of public characters which ought to drive the design process. "You want to place hubs at the center," Joyce Bromberg, the director of space planning, says. "These are the ones other people go to in order to get information. Give them an environment that allows access. But there are also going to be times that they need to have control—so give them a place where they can get away. Gatekeepers represent the fit between groups. They transmit ideas. They are brokers, so you might want to put them at the perimeter, and give them front porches"—areas adjoining the workspace where you might put little tables and chairs. "Maybe they could have swinging doors with white boards, to better transmit information. As for pulsetakers, they are the roamers. Rather than give them one fixed work location, you might give them a series of touchdown spots—where you want them to stop and talk. You want to enable their meandering."

One of the other team members was a tall, thoughtful man named Frank Graziano. He had a series of pencil drawings—with circles representing workstations of all the people whose minds, as he put it, he wanted to make "explicit." He said that he had done the plan the night before. "I think we can thread innovation through the floor," he went on, and with a pen drew a red line that wound its way through the maze of desks. It was his Hudson Street.

"The Death and Life of Great American Cities" was a controversial book, largely because there was always a whiff of paternalism in Jacobs's vision of what city life ought to be. Chelsea—the neighborhood directly to the north of her beloved West Village—had "mixtures and types of buildings and densities of dwelling units per acre . . . almost identical with those of Greenwich Village," she noted. But its long-predicted renaissance would never happen, she maintained, because of the "barriers of long, self-isolating blocks." She hated Chatham Village, a planned "garden city" development in Pittsburgh. It was a picturesque green enclave, but it suffered, in Jacobs's analysis, from a lack of sidewalk life. She wasn't concerned that some people might not want an active street life in their neighborhood; that what she saw as the "self-isolating blocks" of Chelsea others would see as a welcome respite from the bustle of the city, or that Chatham Village would appeal to some people precisely because one did not encounter on its sidewalks a "solid wave of conversation and animation." Jacobs felt that city dwellers belonged in environments like the West Village, whether they realized it or not.

The new workplace designers are making the same calculation, of course. The point of the new offices is to compel us to behave and socialize in ways that we otherwise would not—to overcome our initial inclination to be office suburbanites. But, in all the studies of the new workplaces, the reservations that employees have about a more social environment tend to diminish once they try it. Human behavior, after all, is shaped by context, but how it is shaped—and whether we'll be happy with the result—we can understand only with experience. Jane Jacobs knew the virtues of the West Village because she lived there. What she couldn't know was that her ideas about community would ultimately make more sense in the workplace. From time to time, social critics have bemoaned the falling rates of community participation in American life, but they have made the same mistake. The reason Americans are content to bowl alone (or, for that matter, not bowl at all) is that, increasingly, they receive all the social support they need—all the serendipitous interactions that serve to make them happy and productive—from nine to five. ♦



BOOKED FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Insights from the Indies

More than a hundred thousand new books were published in the United States last year, a staggering figure that begins to account for the myriad choices displayed in local bookstores. Yet books—the product of so many hours of imagination, rumination, and creation—find their way to readers through seemingly chance encounters.

Given the odds involved, one wonders if it is easier for someone past their prime to find the perfect mate than it is for a reader to find the right book. But, just as personal matchmaking has evolved into a vibrant industry, independent booksellers—the matchmakers of the book world—often exert a vital influence on readers.

The recommendations of local booksellers, with their years of experience and richly honed skills, often have a powerful influence over the ultimate fate of a book. Contemporary literary lore is replete with legends of so-called "little books that could"—titles originally expected to garner modest sales—but emerged as best-sellers after inciting the enthusiasm of booksellers.

Book Sense, speaking with the collective voice of nearly twelve hundred independent booksellers coast to coast, produces a bimonthly listing called "The Book Sense 76 Recommendation List." Using a title that pays homage to the independence of the founding fathers, each edition lists seventy-six of indie booksellers' favorite choices from a variety of categories. The following are some of their current selections, along with a few more to keep an eye on:

Book images/Stephen Attard

NOVELTIES

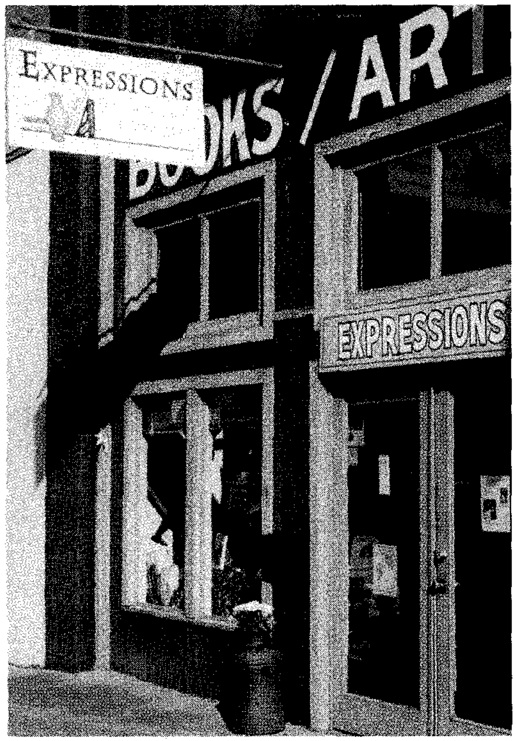
Standout books in any season's bumper crop of new novels usually fall into one of two camps: they feature a voice so original it demands to be heard or they offer a penetrating new perspective that forever alters how readers perceive the world.

"Pobby and Dingan" by Ben Rice (Knopf) earned a rave review from Jean Westcott of Olsson's Books & Records in Arlington, VA. She reports: "I found it to be so strange—a boy's story of his sister's imaginary friends, told in childspeak. Rural Australian childspeak. It was also so instantly engaging that I was hooked."

While "the great American novel" is praise often awarded frivolously, "How All This Started" by Pete Fromm (Picador) may truly deserve the kudo. Jan Peccia of the Montana Book Company in Helena, MT, tells of her immersion in "this wild ride of an intense relationship between an adoring brother and his out-of-control manic depressive sister." The story is set against "the bleak backdrop of West Texas." Peccia heartily concurs with the publisher's assessment that this book about 'baseball, firearms, and manic depression is this year's great American novel.' "

STRANGER THAN FICTION

Truth *is* often stranger than fiction and, year after year, the maxim proves true. Joining the spate of popular books chronicling the imaginative fraud perpetrated by scholarly grifters is Miles Harvey's "The Island of Lost Maps: A True Story of Cartographic Crime" (Random House). Holly Van Lyssel of Beaucoup Books in New Orleans describes it as "the fascinating true story of oddball Gilbert Bland, a man who went on a cross-country antique map-stealing spree. As in 'The Orchid Thief,' " she says, "this is a compelling look at a bizarre underground world."

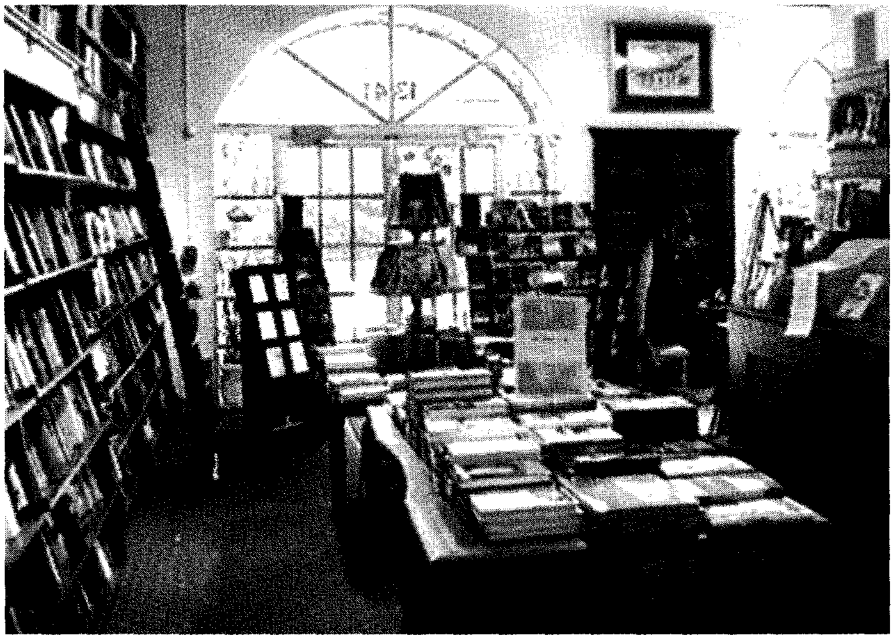


And truth, it turns out, is often compelling enough. Karen Baker of the Country Bookseller in Wolfeboro, NH, highly recommends a new book by Larry Colton, "Counting Coup: A True Story of Basketball and Honor on the Little Big Horn" (Warner Books). Baker writes that "this team of Crow Indian and white girls gives us a way to experience life on and off the reservation: success and failure, rivalry and friendship, and ultimately, hope." The inside story behind one of the world's most successful advertising campaigns has some colorful turns of its own. Of Carl Hamilton's "Absolut: Biography of a Bottle" (Texere), Harold Bloom writes, "a joyous and outrageous escapade into high regions of both the literary sublime and Absolut farce."

ROBOT RETRO

More than a hundred robots and their creators are profiled in "Robo sapiens: Evolution of a New Species" by Peter Menzel and Faith D'Aluisio (MIT/Material World Books). "This is the ultimate coffee table book," writes Christopher Hubbuch of The Ruminator bookstore in St. Paul, MN. "However you feel about our mechanical friends, this book will amaze, surprise, and possibly scare you."

"The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip" by George Saunders (Villard) is a book in the exemplary tradition of Saint-Exupéry, according to Scott Foley of Grass Roots Books & Music in Corvallis, OR. With illustrations by Lane Smith, this is "a deeply resonant fable" that the whole family will appreciate. It contains "all the quirks of Roald Dahl, the wordplay of Seuss, and a heart as big as a house."



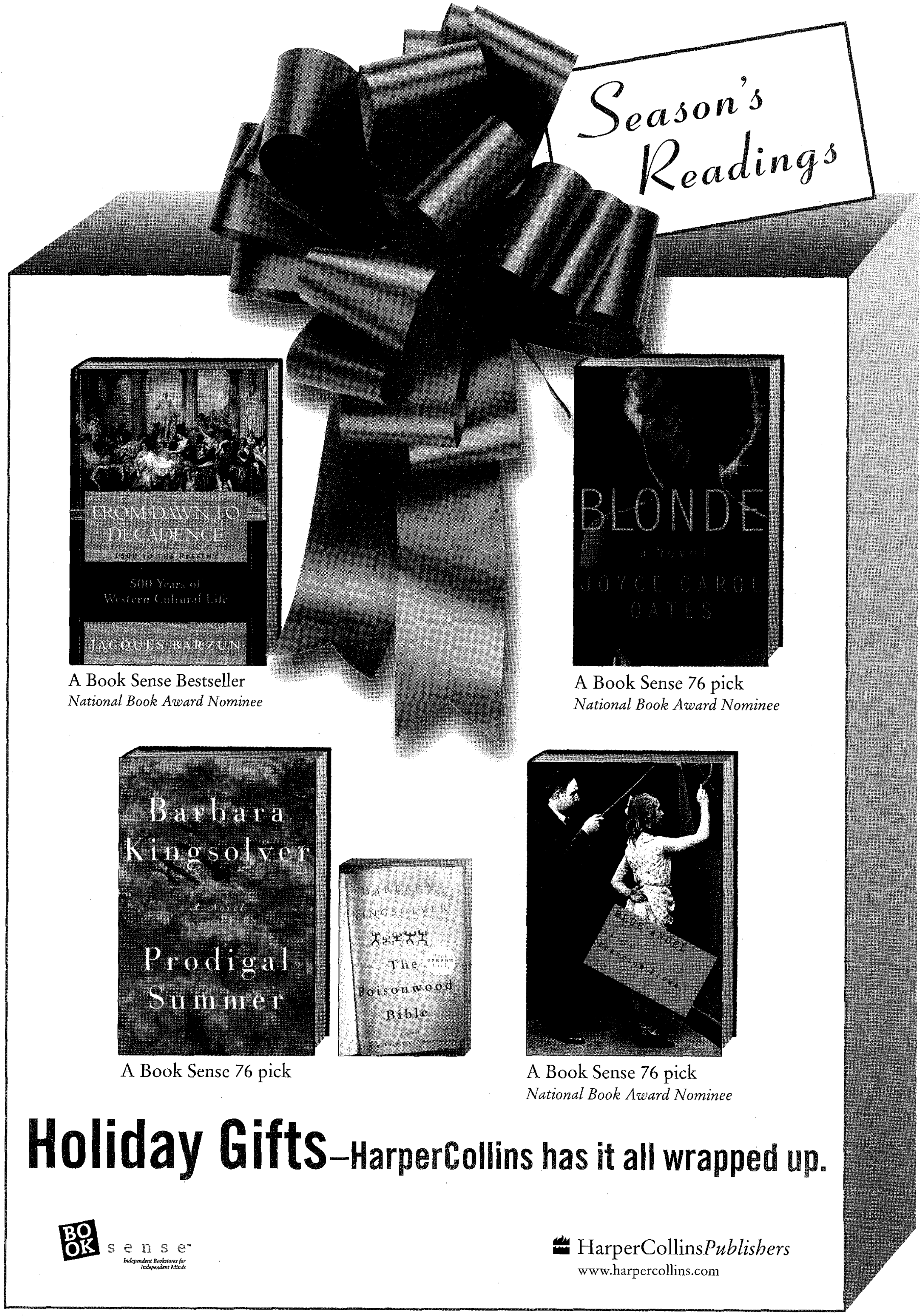
Top: Florida's Sarasota News & Books; Bottom: bookstore/art gallery Expressions in Winchester, Tennessee

RESOUNDING REFRAIN

For readers whose imagination has been indelibly fired by themes from the classics, two titles that reconstruct familiar terrain are tagged as 'books to watch' by Book Sense pollsters.

"Ahab's Wife: The Star-Gazer" by Sena Jeter Naslund (Harper Perennial), now in paperback, explores the life of one of the female characters from "Moby-Dick." It's "a fabulous book, up to the highest literary standards," writes Audrey Beach Schuetze of Hawley-Cooke Booksellers in Louisville, KY. "This is the perfect consummation of Ahab's incomplete world."

A new spin on "Cinderella" is found in "Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister" by Gregory Maguire (Regan Books). Praising Maguire as "a champion of the outcast," Rob Merrell of Different Drummer Books in Laguna Beach, CA, describes the novel, set in seventeenth-century Holland, as "a pure delight to read."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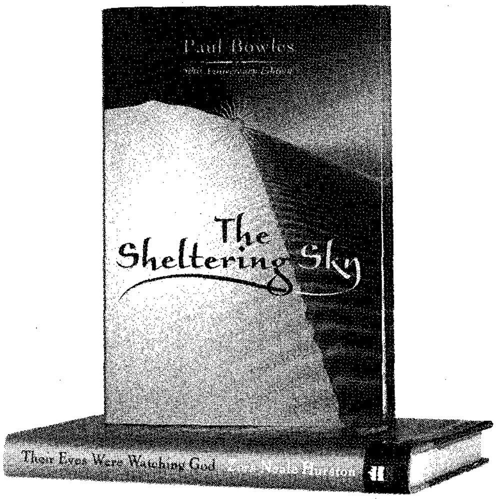
POTTERMANIA

When a character becomes a bellwether of children's culture, its creator rightly spawns a permanent niche in local bookstores. But what to read until installment number five of Harry Potter is available? As everyone (especially J. K. Rowling) knows, it takes time to create magic. Thankfully, there are books to fill the void.



"The Amber Spyglass (His Dark Materials, No. 3)" by Philip Pullman (Knopf) is enthusiastically touted by Elaine Sopchak of The Book Rack & Children's Pages in Champlain Mill, Winooski, VT. "This is the magnificent conclusion to a trilogy I never wanted to see end. The writing is masterful; you are there every step of the way. I gasped, I hoped, I cried," says Sopchak. "Rarely have I read such an exciting adventure that touched on so many meaningful topics and resonated so deeply within me."

BURIED TREASURE

Rediscovered gems, published anew for a fresh generation of readers, are among the books currently finding their way onto local bookstore shelves. Rated among the top ten vote-getters by Book Sense's independent booksellers is "A Month in the Country" by J. L. Carr (NYRB Classics). Henry Berliner of The Foundry Bookstore in New Haven, CT, writes: "This wonderful book, which should never have been allowed to go out of print, is one of the real gems of modern English fiction—a lovely story, lovingly told, exquisitely written. I envy those reading it for the first time."

Commemorative hardcover editions of two other classics will arrive at bookstores in time for the holidays. A new edition of Zora Neale Hurston's "Their Eyes Were Watching God" (HarperCollins), published on the fortieth anniversary of her death, retains its original 1937 cover art, but has a new foreword by novelist Edwidge Danticat. According to Alice Walker, "There is no book more important than this one." A fiftieth anniversary edition of Paul Bowles' "The Sheltering Sky" (The Ecco Press) features Tennessee Williams' original *New York Times* book review. Tobias Wolff praised the book as "one of the most original, even visionary, works of fiction . . . of the century."

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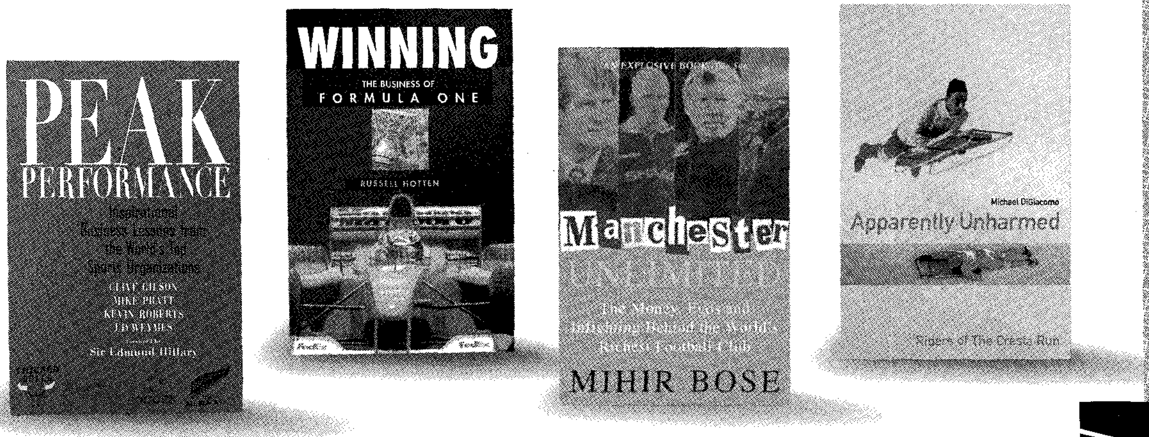

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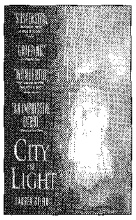
TEXERE

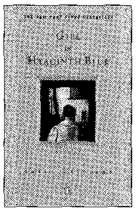
The Book Sense 76

The Top Ten recommendations for November/December Book Sense 76, as voted by independent booksellers.



1. CITY OF LIGHT

by Lauren Belfer (Dell, $6.99 paper) "A fabulous first novel. Buffalo at the turn of the century is a city of great wealth and sophistication, but behind the facade of bourgeois life lie dark secrets. This book is a great literary accomplishment."–ANDY ROSS, CODY'S, BERKELEY, CA

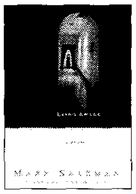


2. GIRL IN HYACINTH BLUE

by Susan Vreeland (Penguin, $11 paper) "My FAVORITE book last year! Like a little jewel in one's hand, this book sparkles with charm and inventiveness."—BRITTON TRICE, GARDEN DISTRICT BOOK SHOP, NEW ORLEANS, LA

3. LEARNING TO SWIM: A Memoir

by Ann Turner (Scholastic, $14.95) "I found this book incredibly moving. It will gently and truthfully tell children and adults what survivors of sexual abuse live through. For the survivors, it will prove to be a shame-lifting step on the path to their own healing."—MARIAN HUGHES, BOOKSHOP SANTA CRUZ, SANTA CRUZ, CA

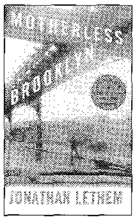


4. LYING AWAKE

by Mark Salzman (Knopf, $24) "Another beautiful book by this great author. A nun who believes she has received God in the form of intense visions must decide whether surgery will obliterate her spiritual life. A wonderful exploration of spirituality."—DANA DEVITO, MORAVIAN BOOK SHOP, BETHLEHEM, PA

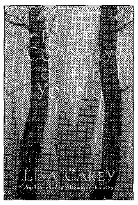
5. AHAB'S WIFE

by Sena Jeter Naslund (HarperPerennial, $15 paper) "A rich and complex epic adventure on land and sea. The heroine is both utterly contemporary and convincingly of her time. A book you will not soon forget."—LILLA WEINBERGER, READERS' BOOKS, NAPA, CA



6. MOTHERLESS BROOKLYN

by Jonathan Lethem (Vintage Contemporaries, $13 paper) "The first-person narration, by an orphan with Tourette's syndrome who grows up to be a small-time gangster, is brilliant. It's James Joyce meets Elmore Leonard."—CAROLE HORNE, HARVARD BOOK STORE, CAMBRIDGE, MA

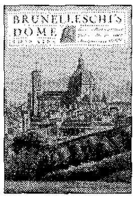


7. IN THE COUNTRY OF THE YOUNG

by Lisa Carey (Morrow, $24) "Set on a fictional island in Maine, this novel encompasses Irish history, folklore, and fantasy to weave its tale. A delightful and haunting novel that will stay with the reader long after the last chapter is finished."—FRAN HEGARTY, BOOKSMITH, WOBURN, MA

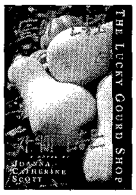
8. A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY

by J.L. Carr (NYRB Classics, $12.95 paper) "I am absolutely ecstatic to learn that this beautiful book is back in print. We cannot wait to handsell this poignant and gentle novel for years to come!"—SUSAN SCOTT, SECRET GARDEN BOOKSHOP, SEATTLE, WA



9. BRUNELLESCHI'S DOME: How a Renaissance Genius Reinvented Architecture

by Ross King (Walker, $24) "It's all here: the building of one of the world's most notable landmarks and engineering wonders, the competition between artisans, and everyday life in Florence." —PHIL SMITH, BRACE BOOKS & MORE, PONCA CITY, OK



10. THE LUCKY GOURD SHOP

by Joanna Catherine Scott (MacMurray & Beck, $25) "This is a beautifully written, powerful tale that one will not soon forget. It is destined to be a Book Sense Bestseller!"—LINDA JOHNSON, BOOKS AT STONEHENGE, RALEIGH, NC

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LETTER FROM BAGHDAD

THE UNVANQUISHED

Saddam Hussein seems to think he can still win the Gulf War—and, with his oil reserves, he just might.

BY JON LEE ANDERSON

Ala al-Bashir is a thin man with an oval face, small brown eyes, and a large nose. His head looks very much like the heads of the figures carved on alabaster vases by Sumerian artists five thousand years ago, except that al-Bashir is nearly bald, with a fringe of white hair that falls to the nape of his neck. He is a plastic surgeon, and for the last five years he has been the director of the Saddam Center for Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, in Baghdad. I was told by an Iraqi diplomat in Europe that al-Bashir is a friend of Saddam Hussein, although al-Bashir himself neither confirmed nor denied this.

Ala al-Bashir's office is a large lime-green room with a photograph of Saddam on the wall. I was talking with him there one day when an attendant brought in a plastic flyswatter and placed it carefully against the legs of al-Bashir's chair. Al-Bashir kept his eyes on mine and seemed not to have noticed the intrusion, but I saw his left hand drop to the flyswatter. His eyes began flickering around the room and his head moved slightly to the right, where a lone fly was buzzing. With a deft lunge, al-Bashir whacked it. He smiled slightly and placed the flyswatter back exactly where it had been, but kept his hand hovering just above it, ready for action.

Several minutes seemed to pass before I had al-Bashir's attention again. I was explaining to him that it was my hope that he could tell me what kind of man Saddam Hussein is. Al-Bashir replied that, first of all, I should understand that nobody in Baghdad was going to criticize Saddam: "He is our President, and we are within our rights to praise him." Then he said he knew that anything he told me about Saddam would not be reported accurately. When I asked him why he believed this, al-Bashir explained that he had "evidence that you will not be able to tell the truth, because when people have tried to in the past they have been crushed." He elaborated at some length, and concluded by remarking, "I believe Hitler must have done some good things for Germany, but who can say this today? No one can, because of Zionist control of the media."

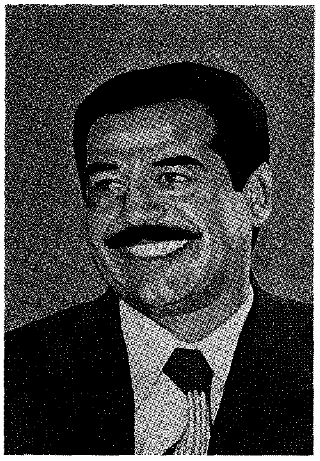
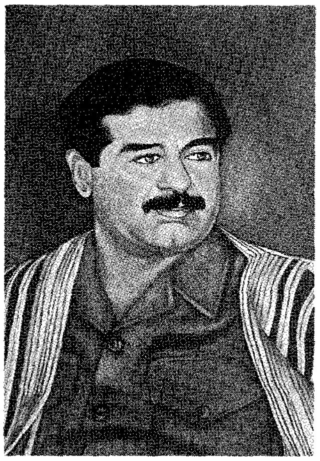
Not that this mattered to Ala al-Bashir or to Saddam. "Saddam Hussein doesn't care what the West thinks," he said vehemently. "He thinks as an Iraqi, and he thinks foremost of the country. He doesn't care about elections every four years and all that rubbish. He wants Iraq to be strong, and he is trying to do the best thing for his country. . . . And, yes, Saddam is a strong man, and this is maybe why he punishes his enemies and traitors so . . . strongly. Because in our civilization we are like a family, and betrayal is the worst thing you can do. But he is a good friend, a good friend to his friends—that I can tell you. Unless he is betrayed."

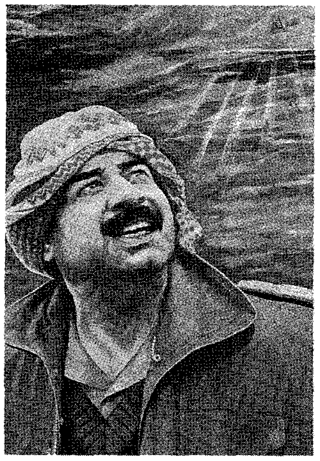
A few days later, Ala al-Bashir invited me to his home for lunch. He lives in a suburb not far from the Amiriya air-raid shelter, which is now a museum. During the Gulf War, Allied bombs killed more than four hundred people who had taken refuge there. A Mercedes and a Volvo were parked in al-Bashir's driveway. Inside the one-story house there were black marble floors and many paintings and sculptures. Al-Bashir received me dressed in sandals, chinos, and a white polo shirt. On this occasion, we talked about art, because, as it turns out, al-Bashir is an accomplished painter and sculptor and had only recently returned from Moscow, where he had attended the opening of an exhibition of his work. He handed me the catalogue from the show, which was titled "Predicament." It included a series of clay pieces depicting people with tortured faces, buried alive in rubble or trying to burst out of walls. Al-Bashir explained that he had attempted to show the suffering caused by the sanctions imposed on Iraq after the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. He said that many of the images were inspired by what he had seen in the gory aftermath of the Amiriya air-raid-shelter bombing, as bodies were pulled from the ruins.

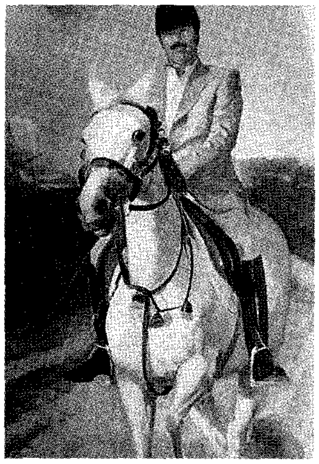
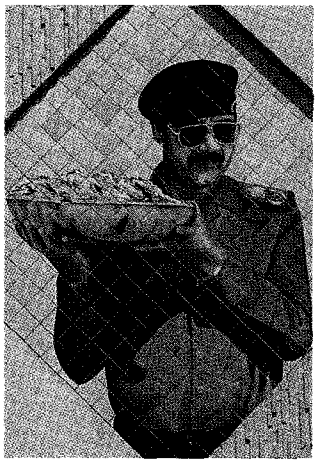
Al-Bashir has very strong opinions about Western art. He particularly dislikes "shock art" artists like Damien Hirst. "I find it strange," he said, "that all such art attacks the figures of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ. Why? Because the Zionist movement in the West is attempting to destroy the Christian community. And the next step will be that they destroy all the moral structures and principles of Christianity, and then destroy European society." When I expressed my skepticism about his theory, al-Bashir had a rebuttal. "Then tell me," he said, "why do they never attack Moses? I challenge anyone in the West to try! I am sure they will not be able to." He added that in his view Salman Rushdie's "Satanic Verses" was also part of the Jewish conspiracy. "Do you honestly believe there is some kind of council sitting around planning these things?" I asked him. Al-Bashir reflected for a moment, and then replied, "Yes, I believe it's organized."

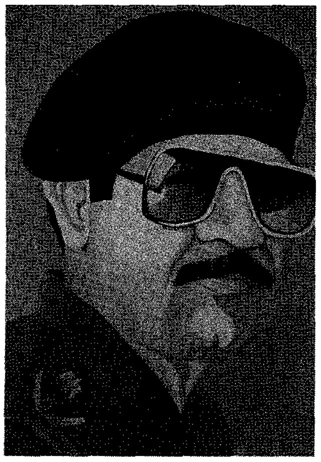
The road to Baghdad from Amman, Jordan, is six hundred miles long. It crosses a desert that turns from bone-white to obsidian-black and then into expanses of ochre- and terra-cotta-colored dirt. Every so often, gaseous panoramas—mirages—appear in the distance. The Jordanian section of the road has only two lanes, and on my way to Baghdad I was stuck on it for hours, crawling along in a G.M.C. Suburban, behind empty oil tankers headed for the Iraqi bor-

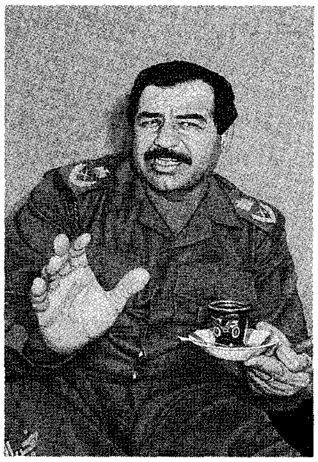
Saddam rarely appears in public, but images of him are everywhere in Iraq. He is omnipresent, unavoidable, and oppressive.

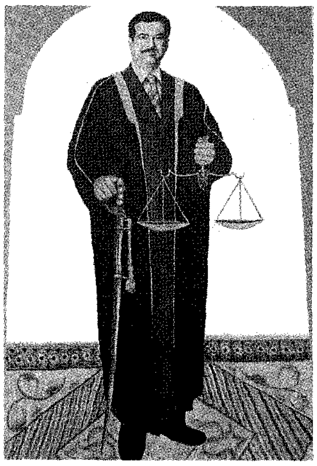











PANELS 1-5 AND 10-15: JACQUES PAVLOVSKY/CORBIS-SYGMA; PANELS 6-7 AND 16: ANTONIO RIBEIRO/LIAISON; PANEL 8: CHIP HIRES/LIAISON; PANEL 9: TOM STODDART/KATZ/SABA

der. Jordan buys oil from Iraq under an arrangement that makes it possible to avoid United Nations supervision and the constraints on trading mandated by the sanctions. Until quite recently, everybody else, at least customers who buy their oil legally, got Iraqi oil from pipelines that exit in Turkey or at the Mina al-Bakr terminal, in the Persian Gulf. Money from those sales is put in an escrow account that is controlled by the U.N. Thirty per cent of the money is doled out as reparations to people or governments or corporations that have made claims for losses suffered during the invasion and occupation of Kuwait. The rest is used to buy goods and services that the U.N. has approved for use in Iraq. Jordan buys its oil at special low rates, and it pays Iraq directly. Thus the long lines of tankers.

The Iraqi border post is a jumble of one-story cinder-block buildings surrounded by a chain-link fence. The only spot of color in the dusty landscape is a huge billboard with a portrait of Saddam Hussein dressed in traditional Arab robes and a head scarf. He smiles benignly next to a phrase in Arabic that welcomes visitors. I spent a couple of hours there, arguing with officials who insisted that I take an AIDS test (because "Iraq is the only AIDS-free country in the world"), and dispensing "tips" to security, customs, immigration, and health inspectors. My driver, a Jordanian who had loaded up the back of the Suburban with contraband to sell in Baghdad, squatted in the shade of the car and smoked. Then we drove off on what had become an eerily empty six-lane superhighway. The old two-lane road snaked through the desert beside us. It was designated for heavy vehicles, and the oil tankers moved along it in both directions, the ones coming from Iraq with their tanks full advancing more slowly than the trucks going east.

A couple of hours past the border, we approached the reedy banks of the Euphrates River, and as we entered the Mesopotamian Valley the desert began to recede and a patchwork of irrigation canals, tilled fields, and, here and there, the modest, flat-roofed earthen dwellings of peasant farmers appeared. Before long, there was urban sprawl, and cars, lots of them, zipping alongside us, and then, suddenly, we were in Baghdad, a relentlessly earth-colored place whose drabness is broken only by the occasional peacock-blue or gold dome of a mosque, or by a dusty stand of eucalyptus and date palms. Most of the city is a harsh geometry of brown squares, rectangles, and concrete towers. During the thirty years that Saddam and his Baath Socialist Party have been in power, ancient neighborhoods, in a campaign reminiscent of Ceauşescu's in Romania, have been torn down and refashioned into uniform blocks of buildings. They are in the "New Islamic" style, which is characterized by self-conscious archways, columns, and minarets made of unpainted concrete or, more felicitously, dressed up with fascias of ivory-colored limestone.

Six million people live in Baghdad, and the city's shopping streets were crowded. Despite the fact that Iraq has endured ten years of economic sanctions, including a full trade embargo, a fair number of these people were obese, especially the men, many of whom had a distinctive bowling-pin shape. Markets overflowed with produce, and the open bays of restaurants exuded the aroma of freshly baked sesame bread and the greasy hot musk of spiced lamb roasting on spits. At traffic lights and outside restaurants, small groups of black-robed women and children begged, but they seemed proportionally fewer in number than the panhandlers still found on the streets of New York. Aside from the antiaircraft guns on the roofs of government buildings and armed guards everywhere, Baghdad looked like a fairly typical Middle Eastern city. There wasn't much evidence of damage from the war or from Operation Desert Fox, the bombing strikes made by the U.S. and Great Britain late in 1998. On the surface, the most distinctive thing about Baghdad was that there were almost no signs of the global economy: no McDonald's or Pizza Huts.

The commercial heart of Baghdad, with its frenetic souks and bazaars, lies on the east bank of the Tigris River, which runs through the center of the city. Vast complexes of parklands, government buildings, Presidential palaces, and several great public monuments lie to the west of the river. Everything there is built on an epic, almost pharaonic scale. One of the newest public places, the Triumph Leader Museum, is under Baghdad's clock tower, a samovar-shaped structure that rises in a high spire from parklands near the Hands of Victory Pavilion, where the giant bronze arms

TWO VOICES

I heard a voice behind me in the street
calling my name. This was not years ago,
this was yesterday in Brooklyn, late spring
of the new year, the flowers—roses, tulips,
mock orange, pansies—shouting their colors
along the promenade. I was on my way
to nothing, just ambling along, my head
altogether empty on a Saturday morning
in my seventy-third year. Not altogether empty,
for the flowers were in it, and the crowds
of kids in bright shirts and sweaters, young kids
with their parents in tow, and across the river
there was the city breaking through the haze
to call to the Heights, to belittle Brooklyn
as it always does. Then my name, "Philip,"
a huge voice, deep and resonant, unfamiliar
or if heard before heard on radio or TV,
too sonorous for daily life. So, of course,
I turned to behold more kids on roller blades,
kids on skateboards, kids on foot, no one
especially aware of me. Waiting, awake now

as I had not been, certain the morning meant
more than I'd come looking for. The crowds
passed, the sun grew stronger, the day passed
into afternoon and I gave up at last and turned
for home half-believing I'd missed something.
Let's say I phone you tonight and tell you
my little adventure which came to nothing.
What will you think? Not what will you say,
you'll say it was an illusion or you'll say
there was a deep need in me to hear
that particular voice, or sometimes the voices
of the air—all the separate voices in so
public a place—can unite for a moment
to produce "Philip" or "John" or "Robert"
or whatever we expect. I don't know
what you'll think, I've never known, even
when you and I were together, and I'd
waken in the false dawn to hear you
in the secret voice that was yours crying
out into the dark a name not mine.

—*Philip Levine*

modelled on Saddam's own arms stand. Inside the hollow clock tower, a pendulum decorated with four gilded Kalashnikovs swings slowly back and forth above a marble floor. Around the base of the chamber, seven large galleries house an eclectic collection of gifts received by Saddam from friends and admirers. The items include a pair of decorative riding spurs, labelled as a gift from Ronald Reagan; a collection of guayabera shirts from Fidel Castro; ivory tusks from the former Chadian dictator Hissein Habre; a diamond-and-ruby-encrusted gold Patek Philippe watch from the Sheikh of Bahrain; ceremonial swords from Jacques Chirac and Vladimir Zhirinovsky; and a double-barrelled shotgun and sniper scope from the chief of Russia's intelligence service.

It's pretty much impossible to go anywhere in Iraq and not be reminded of Saddam. Thousands of portraits of him appear on walls and in glazed mosaic tiles on concrete plaques. In granite, bronze, and gilded statues he holds a sword aloft; he prays; he rides a prancing stallion. Saddam smiles, frowns, fires guns, smokes cigars. He is depicted wearing a black leather greatcoat and matching trilby; in military uniform; in Arab robes, three-piece suits, and even, oddly, trekking gear. He is sometimes thin, sometimes imposingly muscular, occasionally fat, his face pouchy and double-chinned. He wears a judge's robes and holds scales in his hands; dandles small children on his knee; stands with bloodied sword over a mutilated serpent whose tail is in the form of a cruise missile. On one building, eight identical smiling Saddams are set together, creating an effect not unlike that of Warhol's "Marilyn Diptych."

Saddam has been making monuments to himself for many years, and since the end of the Gulf War his building frenzy has increased. There are new palaces all over Iraq. Ala al-Bashir, Saddam's plastic-surgeon friend, gave me the authorized explanation of this phenomenon. "Saddam doesn't build his palaces because he wants to live in them," he said. "He usually lives in a very modest house. He builds them because he thinks Iraq should have . . . such things."

The exteriors of Saddam's palaces are immense and forbidding. Most of them are protected by high concrete walls, often engraved with his initials in Arabic script. They are guarded by soldiers in sandbagged machine-gun nests, in massive sentry towers, and at blockaded entrances. The manager of a fish restaurant on the east bank of the Tigris motioned me over to the back door one day and pointed to a high fence that ran behind the building, separating it from the riverbank. He pointed to the other side of the river, where I was able to make out the minarets and cupolas of several large palaces. "All this is Saddam's," he said, waving toward the river and both banks. He said that the Presidential complex stretched for three and a half miles downstream, and that nobody was permitted anywhere near the river on either side. I noticed that the garden in back of the restaurant was neglected and overgrown, and I asked if he ever walked over to the fence, which stood a short distance away. "No. Never!" he said. And, in a quick and impromptu pantomime, he acted out a scene in which he forced an imaginary man roughly to his knees and shot him in the back of the head.

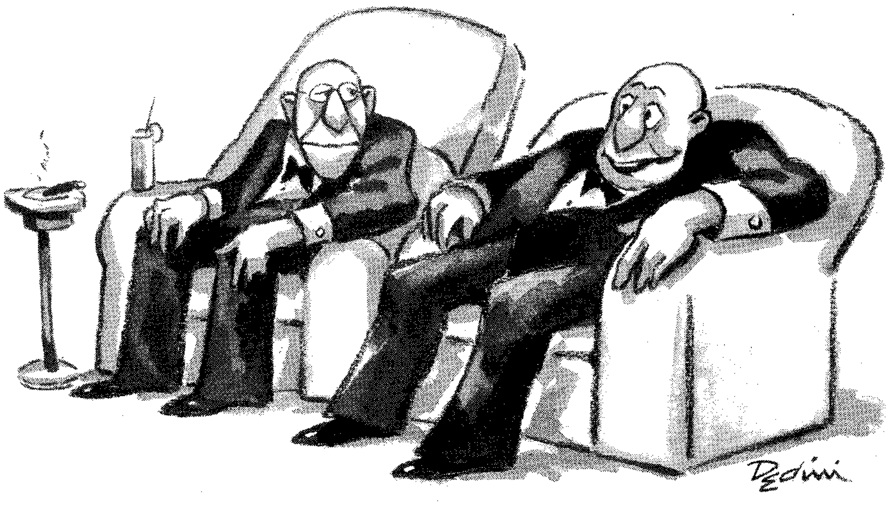
What exactly is in Saddam's palaces was an important issue to the U.N. Special Commission, or UNSCOM, which was created after the Gulf War to insure that Iraq had got rid of its "weapons of mass destruction," as chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons are usually referred to. A U.N. Security Council resolution stipulated that sanctions would not be withdrawn until Iraq was disarmed, but the UNSCOM inspectors reported that the Iraqis lied about what they had destroyed, continued to conceal weapons and weapon-making systems, and, in general, refused to coöperate with them. In the fall of 1997, Tariq Aziz, the Iraqi official in charge of dealing with UNSCOM, began refusing access to what he called "Presidential sites." UNSCOM inspectors couldn't enter these sites because to do so would be to impugn the "national dignity and sovereignty of Iraq." Richard Butler, who was then the head of UNSCOM, wrote in his book “The Greatest Threat” that the inspectors were prevented from entering areas which “were not only the places where President Saddam Hussein and his security operatives lived and worked; according to our information, they were also the sites from which his program for weapons of mass destruction was designed and operated and where the physical components of the program were probably stored as well.” Since there were so many such places, and since both the Iraqis and the inspectors were adamant, an impasse was reached. Butler recalls that Tariq Aziz agreed that the sites “aren’t clearly defined,” but he said that “they are sites associated with the Presidency, and they are well known, very well known to all Iraqis.” Late in 1998, UNSCOM withdrew from Iraq, and in December of that year the United States and Great Britain began bombing targets believed to be associated with weapons programs.

“Iraq has always shown an interest in weapons of mass destruction,” Butler said to me recently, “and it would be folly for us to assume that the Iraqis aren’t still developing them, based on their capability, their past record, and scattered evidence that has emerged. I believe that they are back in business. I don’t know for sure, but that is the purpose of on-site inspections.” Nevertheless, there have been no weapons inspectors in Iraq for two years, and it is becoming increasingly unlikely that Saddam will permit them in again, unless the U.N. makes substantial revisions in its policy about how they are to operate. “The sanctions are a failure,” Butler said.

Sanctions caused enormous suffering in Iraq. The country’s financial assets abroad were frozen, and imports of food, fuel, industrial machinery, spare parts, and medicine were nearly impossible to come by. Infant-mortality rates doubled, and there was widespread malnutrition and an increase in deaths from communicable diseases and cancer. The U.N. offered to let Saddam sell oil to meet his people’s basic needs in 1991, but he didn’t accept the offer until 1996, when an “oil-for-food” program was put into effect. Iraq was permitted to sell two billion dollars’ worth of oil to pay for food and medical supplies under U.N. supervision. Last year, the ceiling on oil exports was removed, and this year officially authorized sales reached nearly $17 billion.

Tun Myat, a U.N. official who coördinates humanitarian relief in Iraq and who worked for the World Food Program for twenty-two years, told me that Iraq has one of the best food-distribution systems he’d seen anywhere in the world. Food has been rationed efficiently since sanctions went into effect, and under the oil-for-food program the standard of living in Iraq has improved. Smuggling has also increased dramatically in the past few years. Oil is shipped illicitly into Turkey and Jordan or through Iranian waters. Huge profits for Iraq are engendered in this way, and, as Richard Butler notes, the country is “awash with money” now, although most of it goes to the regime rather than the people.

“Sanctions are crumbling,” Dr. Ahmed Hashemi, one of Saddam’s propaganda officers, said to me. Dr. Hashemi is the director of the Committee for Friendship, Peace, and Solidarity, which has its offices in a yellow brick Ottoman-era villa in central Baghdad. He is a short, stout, cheerful man who speaks excellent English with an American accent. Dr. Hashemi was very clear about why things were going Iraq’s way. “Four countries have the oil reserves to supply the world until the end of the ‘oil time,’ ” he said: “Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Iraq. The only country outside of American control is Iraq, which, by the way, has the largest oil reserves—not Saudi Arabia. If America can control Iraq, it will indeed be an American millennium. But if the other countries can prevent the U.S. from controlling Iraq, they will prevent the U.S. from becoming the sole power, and a balanced, multipolar world can emerge. As Iraqis, we know that the future of the world is being decided here.”



“Even my childhood dreams were of tax cuts.”

It is true that the case for maintaining the sanctions has always been made most forcibly by the United States and Great Britain. The three other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council—China, Russia, and France—have for some time opposed them. Russia and France were among Iraq’s main creditors before 1990, and they are both owed billions of dollars. Both countries maintained their embassies in Baghdad. In 1997, when Iraq began selling substantial quantities of oil for the first time since the Gulf War, the price of crude dropped six dollars a barrel in ninety days. Iraq’s oil was not a small factor in the renewed interest in loosening sanctions this year, as petroleum prices went above thirty dollars a barrel and remained at a ten-year high.

Early in August, President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela broke the taboo against political visits to Iraq. He crossed over the Iranian border for a meeting with Saddam about an upcoming OPEC conference. Chavez was the first democratically elected head of state to visit Iraq since the war, and the local press praised him for making a “principled moral stand” against the “silly” opposition of the United States. His helicopter landed at Saddam International Airport, which had been more or less deserted since 1991, when the Iraqis sent the last of their commercial planes out of the country to protect them from the Allied bombing.

A week after Chavez's visit, the airport was officially reopened. A military unit of bagpipe players—a touch left over from the first half of the twentieth century, when Britain occupied the country under a League of Nations mandate and then maintained close ties with the Hashemite monarchy—marched back and forth outside the terminal building, in front of a couple of V.I.P. tents, where folding chairs had been set up. The flight staff of Iraqi Airways had been summoned from their enforced retirement for the occasion, and they milled about in dusted-off pilots' and stewardesses' uniforms.

Inside the terminal, a group of schoolchildren were being coached by their teacher in a song-and-dance routine. One of them held up a framed portrait of Saddam, and they chanted praises to "the victory of Baghdad," and proclaimed their willingness to "sacrifice" themselves to defend it. An electronic signboard displayed the arrival times of fictitious flights from Paris, London, Amman, Madrid, and Sydney.

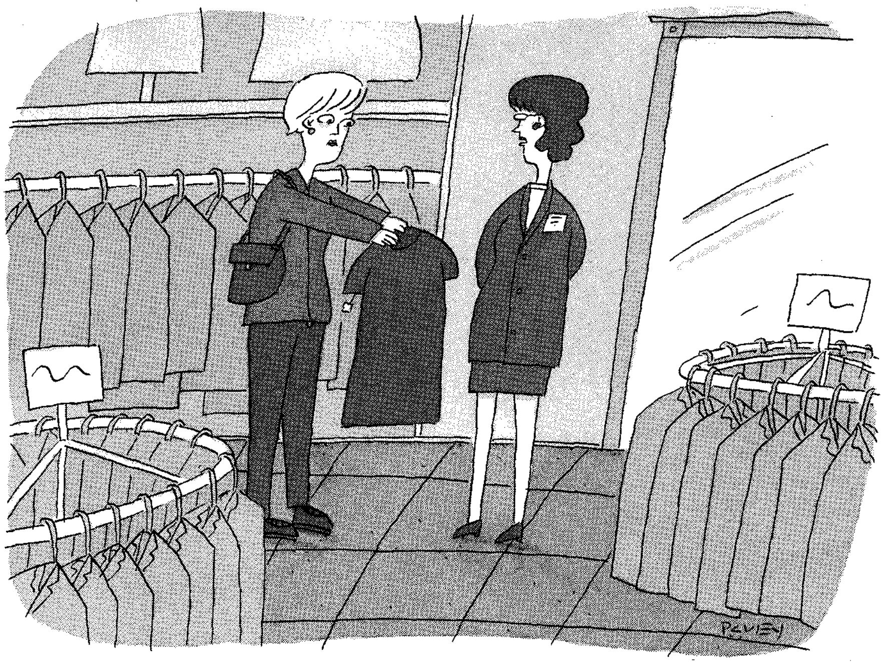
Outside, the faces of the guests waiting in the V.I.P. tents were flushed and streaming with sweat. Every few minutes, the bagpipers went inside the terminal to cool off, but then they came out and marched back and forth some more, making a terrific din. In a passageway that led to a covered parking area, I noticed two rough-looking men in dirty clothes who were holding long, sharp knives. They stood guard over several sheep. Then the big moment finally came, and an Iraqi Airways jet, which had taken off from somewhere nearby, flew in slowly and landed on the airstrip. Soon afterward, the speeches began. I couldn't bear the heat any longer, and decided to leave. As I walked toward my car, I passed the men with the knives, who were herding their woolly charges up a footpath toward the V.I.P. tents. The sheep were about to become sacrificial victims at a portentous post-Gulf War event.

Two days later, a Russian Yak-42 carrying an official delegation and a cargo of baby food landed at the airport. Then a French plane chartered by dozens of pro-Iraqi political activists and a roller-skating team arrived. Soon foreign flights were an almost daily occurrence. Morocco, Jordan, Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, and several other states sent in planes, and more arrived from Russia. Early in November, around the time a well-attended international trade fair was held in Baghdad, flights resumed to Basra and Mosul, both of which are in the no-fly zones (which cover sixty per cent of Iraq) that the U.S. and Britain have been enforcing since 1991, independently of the U.N.

Most of the countries sending planes to Baghdad asked the U.N. sanctions committee for permission to fly, or at least notified it that they were going to. France claimed that the sanctions had never included an embargo on civilian flights, a position that Peter Hain, the British Foreign Office minister in charge of the Middle East, termed "contemptible." Peter van Walsum, the chairman of the sanctions committee, admitted that what was going on was not "a healthy situation," but he said that the problem was about an interpretation of the rules and not a collapse of the system. To most observers, however, it looked like a collapse of the system.

The United States didn't do anything much about the Iraqi Airways flights to Basra and Mosul, but the U.S. seems to have been de-escalating its surveillance patrols and bombing missions in general. It's hard to get American officials to discuss the activities in the no-fly zones in detail, especially since the embarrassing incident last year when they mistook a sheep-watering trough for a surface-to-air missile launcher and dropped a three-thousand-pound bomb on a group of shepherds and their families.

Saddam seemed to be taking advantage of the reluctance of the United States to get involved in a crisis with Iraq during the turmoil of the Presidential campaign. He also found himself in a stronger position among other Arabs than he had been in for some time—even with the Iranians, with whom he was at war in the nineteen-eighties. At the end of September, the Iraqi Vice-President met with the Iranian President at an OPEC conference in Caracas and discussed "coöperation." Then the Palestinian-Israeli conflict erupted again, and Saddam's anti-American, anti-Israeli rhetoric began to have more resonance. On November 7th, Election Day in the U.S., Saddam stopped oil exports out of Turkey until the letters of credit from buyers were converted to euros, since dollars are the currency of the enemy. In mid-November, he an-



"You can always put it in your closet and leave it there."

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nounced that six million Iraqis had volunteered for a jihad to liberate Palestine from the "accursed" Jews. And he began sending convoys of food and medical supplies to the Palestinians. He also asked the U.N. to send some of the revenue from the oil-for-food program to provide relief for the Palestinian Authority.

The oil-for-food program is up for a regular review in December, and Saddam wants to wrest control of his oil revenues from the sanctions committee. He requested a reduction in the price of Iraqi oil to accommodate a surcharge of fifty cents a barrel, which buyers would pay into an account in Jordan controlled by Iraq. The U.N. refused to permit this, and on December 1st Saddam stopped loading tankers at Mina al-Bakr and Ceyhan, the Turkish port on the Mediterranean. If his customers had paid the surcharge, they would have violated the sanctions. So they were caught between a rock and a hard place.

One day in my room at the Al-Rashid Hotel, I watched the television coverage of a meeting between Saddam and a group of Iraqi poets. It was presented the way C-SPAN televises events, with a more or less stationary camera focussed on the middle distance. The poets sat at a huge conference table that curved around the edges of a reflecting pool. Saddam lounged in a chair at the far end of the room. He wore an ivory-colored tailored suit and a dark shirt, and he smoked a long cigar, presumably one of the Cohibas that Fidel Castro is said to send him regularly. A uniformed bodyguard stood behind him, scrutinizing everyone else in the room. After listening to the poets recite odes of praise to him, Saddam explained that he had summoned them because he wanted Iraq to have a new national anthem, and he wished them to write it. He said that the new anthem should exalt, among other things, "soldiers on the battlefields, the steadfast fighters of the air defenses," and the Iraqi people's spirit of resistance and martyrdom. Then he rose, saying that he would leave for a while to give the poets some time to write down their inspirations for the new anthem. A half-dozen guards surrounded him as he strode out of the room. The poets began feverishly scribbling on pieces of paper. Saddam returned a while later, again with a flurry of guards, and for the next couple of hours, as the poets recited their new verses, he swivelled in his chair occasionally, alternately staring at the ceiling or into the middle distance. He smoked three more cigars. Puffing away, Saddam acknowledged each poet's contribution with a short nod of the head, a grunt, or a muttered thank-you. Many of the poems, as before, included praise of Saddam. One of the more popular refrains was "O Saddam!" The meeting ended when Saddam told the poets that he would examine what they had written, and then choose one or more of them to rewrite Iraq's anthem.

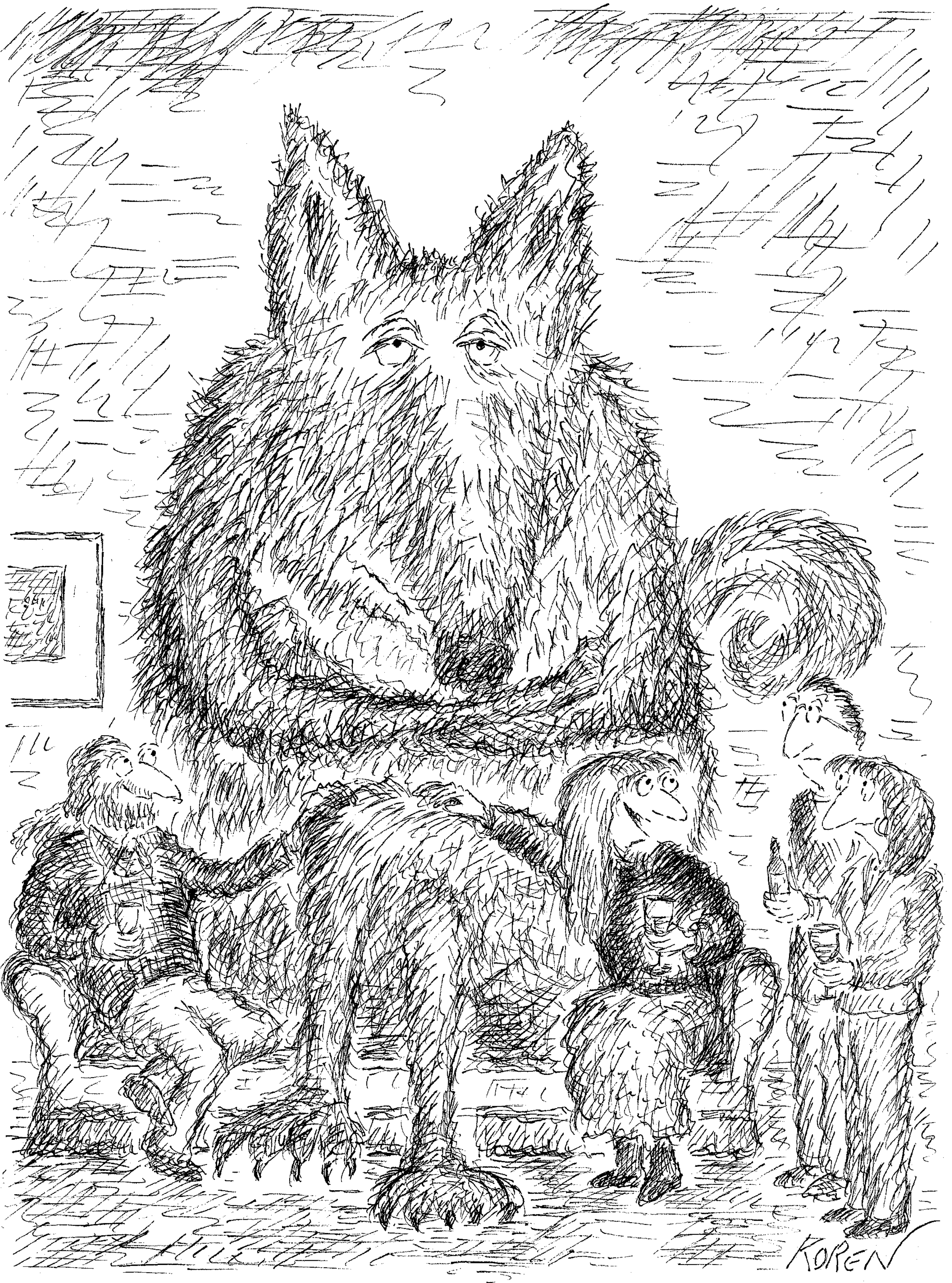
The next day, I met Farouk Salloum, one of the poets who had been at the meeting. Salloum is a good-humored, middle-aged man from Saddam's home town—Tikrit, about a hundred miles north of Baghdad, on the Tigris River—and he is the director of Iraqi Cinema and Theatre. "From time to time, Saddam invites me and a few others to come and discuss poetry and culture with him," he said. "He is a villager, from a poor family, but he is aware of and interested in culture." Salloum emphasized that Saddam had not forgotten his origins. "He is a nature lover. I know that he sometimes goes for a few days to fish, to clear his mind, and to drive sheep through the desert, as he used to do as a boy."

Salloum told me that when he was growing up he heard many tales of Saddam's youthful bravery. One of the most famous stories was about how Saddam used to walk every day to school from his home a few miles from Tikrit. In those days, the countryside was wild and lonely, and inhabited by ferocious wolves. But Saddam was unafraid, and he kept the wolves at bay by singing defiant songs as he walked. This story was so inspiring to Salloum, he told me, that he had written a poem about Saddam in the style of a *rajaz*, a traditional lyric designed to give heart to warriors in battle. Salloum said that it went something like this: "He who is amongst the wolves, whose words turn into poison, frightens his enemies."

Tikrit was the birthplace of Saladin, the Muslim warrior and sultan who captured Jerusalem in 1187 and fought against Richard the Lion-Hearted in the Third Crusade. The connection between Saladin and Saddam is important in the official telling of Saddam's life. "President Saddam Hussein is a man who cannot be understood in the West, because Iraq is different," Ala al-Bashir, the plastic surgeon who is obsessed with Zionists, said to me. "He keeps history very much in his mind, he sees everything"—here al-Bashir stretched his hands out wide—"in a great breadth, keeping in mind the past, the present, and the future. President Saddam Hussein wants Iraq to be elevated from its circumstances, to be raised up. To raise it to the level that the world's oldest civilization *should* have."

Saddam has made Iraq's ancient tribal codes the law of the land. Political dissent is swiftly and brutally crushed. Verbally insulting the President, for instance, is a crime that frequently carries a death sentence. (A recent decree made slanderers subject to amputation, and in September a man had his tongue cut off for such an indiscretion.) In the late nineteen-eighties, Saddam punished Iraq's Kurdish rebels by slaughtering tens of thousands of Kurdish civilians and razing towns and villages. He used poison gas on the town of Halabja, killing some five thousand people. When two of Saddam's sons-in-law defected to Jordan, in 1995, taking his daughters and grandchildren with them, Saddam lured the families back with promises of mercy. But as soon as they returned he demanded that the sons-in-law, who were brothers, divorce their wives. He claimed that the women had been kidnapped, and he arranged for a large contingent of their relatives from the Presidential guard to kill the two men. There was a shootout at a house in Baghdad, at the end of which the brothers, their father, a sister and her children, and two of the attackers were dead. The incident was described officially as a family matter.

Members of Saddam's immediate family and several related clans occupy almost all the positions of political, military, and economic influence in Iraq. His two sons, Uday and Qusay, who are thirty-six and thirty-four years old, respectively, are his natural heirs, but the succession is not clear-cut, and the two men are known to be rivals. Uday has a reputation as a trigger-happy playboy, and has been involved in a series of high-profile scandals. The most lurid



"Rufus, here, is the center of our life!"

"If I knew the meaning of life, would I be sitting in a cave in my underpants?"

occurred in 1988, when he got drunk at a party and used a battery-powered carving knife and a pistol to kill one of his father's closest aides. Then, in 1995, Uday shot and wounded one of his uncles in another quarrel at a party, and also killed six dancing girls. The following year, he was the victim of an assassination attempt. He was left partly paralyzed and is undergoing rehabilitation treatment from Cuban doctors. Uday is rarely seen in public now, but he still has a great deal of power. Last year he won a seat in the Baathist National Assembly. He also controls several businesses and a consortium of newspapers and magazines, and a popular television channel, Youth TV, which airs pirated Hollywood movies. His brother, Qusay, runs their father's secret service. In 1996, Qusay helped oversee a bloody purge of conspirators in a suspected coup plot against Saddam, and he is thought to have played an important role in hiding things from the UNSCOM inspectors. Recently, the official Baathist press has been giving Qusay more coverage and has begun referring to him as Warrior Qusay. He was named his father's deputy "in the event of an emergency," and in August he appeared alongside Saddam wearing a military uniform and a beret at a meeting of the Armed Forces Command.

Saddam is on television almost constantly. Tapes are run of him presiding over closed-door conclaves with the uniformed, beret-wearing members of the Revolutionary Command Council, and every evening a segment is aired that pays homage to him in some way. It usually features an Iraqi poet praising Saddam while a video montage of newsclips in which he appears plays over and over again. Iraq's newspapers likewise keep Saddam at the center of things. "PRESIDENT MEETS AIR DEFENSE COMMANDER" is a typical headline in the Baghdad *Observer*, and on the front page every day there is a maxim culled from Saddam's speeches. These are often in the form of warnings, like Biblical commandments. They seem to indicate that Saddam is highly distrustful of others, extremely calculating, and aware of the vulnerabilities of his power. Curiously, they seem to be reminders to himself as much as parables for the common folk: "Do not take him as companion who thinks you despise him"; "Do not put your friend and enemy on an equal footing, even when a reconciliation with the latter takes place, lest your enemy slight you and your friend make light of the meaning of friendship and its rights. Give each his due according to the treatment he deserves"; and "Do not underrate the simple person who may smear your reputation. Many are the small stones that broke glass houses."

An Iraqi historian told me that although he had observed Saddam closely for many years, the President remained "an enigma, a highly secretive man whose decision-making is beyond anyone's knowledge." The historian pointed out that in the mid-sixties, during the unstable period between the overthrow of the king and the coup that put the Baath Party permanently in power, Saddam spent two years in prison, where he read a great deal. He is said to have been influenced by Isaac Deutscher's biography of Stalin, and also by Machiavelli's "The Prince," which he read and reread. " 'The Prince' asserts that a ruler, if he is to rule effectively, must either be loved or respected and feared," the historian said. "The two are supposed to be mutually exclusive. To judge from Saddam's behavior, he clearly believes the latter is better. Saddam is not known to have any friends, and he does not really move among the people. He is always above them, looking down."

Saddam rarely makes public appearances. Toward the end of November, he appeared on a balcony in Baghdad to view a march of three hundred thousand "volunteers" for the jihad against Israel, but he hadn't been in front of a crowd for a long time. It was a special occasion, and very affecting. Some of the volunteers wore the traditional white uniforms of martyrs, with matching white hoods that had openings for their eyes. They marched with their guns on one shoulder and their right fists held aloft. Saddam wore a black beret and a green military sweater with epaulets and shot several salvos from a rifle he held in one hand.

Saddam is always on guard against assassination attempts, and when he does move around a number of look-alikes serve as decoys for him. His official residence is the Republican Palace, which is situated in the sprawling Presidential complex on the west bank of the Tigris, but Saddam doesn't stay there. He uses the palace for official ceremonies that, for security reasons, are announced to the public after the fact. As recently as two years ago, when UNSCOM's weapons inspectors were still in Baghdad, Saddam's main residence was believed to be a palace situated next to Saddam International Airport, on an estate with an artificial lake. But no Iraqi or foreigner I met in Baghdad could point out the building Saddam actually sleeps in. Looking across the Tigris at several Presidential palaces one afternoon, I asked a man if he knew who occupied them. He shrugged: "Saddam? Qusay? Uday? Their Tikriti friends? Nobody knows." Naji al-Hadithi, Saddam's ambassador in Vienna, tried to turn the sensitive topic of Saddam's paranoia—and his many palaces—into a kind of joke. "Really," he said, "the palaces should be called guesthouses, because Saddam never sleeps in them more than one night."

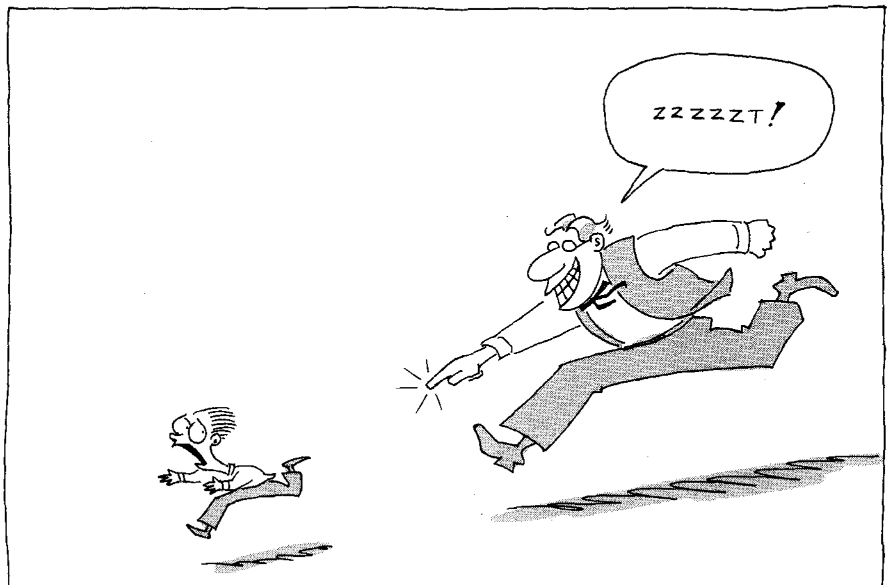
A European diplomat stationed in Baghdad told me that no one he knew of in the diplomatic corps had met Saddam. He and several others thought they were finally going to get their chance in April, when they received invitations to a party for Saddam's sixty-third birthday. They were driven to Tikrit in a convoy of Presidential buses, and for several hours they sat expectantly as groups of townspeople, schoolchildren, and members of civic associations paraded past. "The whole government was there—everyone except Saddam," said the diplomat. There was a lavish banquet, and finally a huge cake appeared, which was cut and eaten in Saddam's honor. Then the diplomats boarded their buses and were driven back to Baghdad.

In early September, stories began circulating in the Arab press that Saddam was suffering from lymphatic cancer and that foreign doctors had been flown to Baghdad to treat him. The last time there were such rumors, in 1997, Saddam turned up in Tikrit and swam across the Tigris three times, à la Mao and his Yangtze swim. But this fall Saddam remained in his televised netherworld, and speculation about his health has persisted. In October, I was told that a team of Cuban doctors had flown to Baghdad via Yemen, bringing with them a large supply of interferon.

In a sense, Saddam has become a virtual dictator.

When I wandered around Baghdad's back-street souks, people usually flashed me a thumbs-up sign if they realized that I was an American. A French diplomat living in Baghdad said that he was bewildered by the lack of anti-American sentiment. "Just imagine if your country was bombing France," he said. "I can assure you that you would not, as an American, feel welcome there." The favorite Iraqi beverage is Pepsi-Cola. Baghdad's movie houses were showing pirated versions of "Another 9½ Weeks" and "Deep Impact" during my visit. "American Beauty" and "Shakespeare in Love" had recently come and gone, and "Gladiator" was expected soon.

One evening, I was invited to dinner by a well-to-do Iraqi family at their home in the Mansour section of Baghdad. The house, which is concealed discreetly behind high garden walls, is unpretentious, the equivalent of a California ranch home. A mid-nineties BMW sedan and a Nissan four-wheel drive of similar vintage were parked in the driveway. My hosts were old money, "not showy people," as they hastened to inform me when they opened the gates and found me gaping in astonishment at the new house across the street from them. It was an eye-stopping "Arabian Nights" fantasy of plate glass, chrome, and cut limestone, all flying eaves and colonnades and overhangs, several stories high. "The smugglers have been moving in," my hostess explained. "They are so rich they just buy up the old houses like ours and then they pull them down and build those horrible things." At dinner, she entertained me with stories about her difficulties with British immigration authorities, who had become less helpful since sanctions were imposed on Iraq, making it difficult for her to visit London as frequently as she liked. "They make such problems for decent



EDISON: THE FATHER ALSO OF STATIC ELECTRICITY people," she said. "But they let in every hairy fundamentalist wearing a robe who wants to go there."

Shops in upscale neighborhoods like Mansour were crammed with electronics goods smuggled into Iraq, but there were not that many members of the middle class who could afford them. Gasoline is dirt cheap, at about two cents a litre, but a litre of bottled water costs ten times that. White-collar employees earn, at most, about ten dollars a month, and laborers bring home half that. As a result, many Iraqis have had to find second jobs, if they can, and policemen and civil servants supplement their salaries through graft or outright theft. Traffic policemen frequently stop drivers for the sole purpose of extracting money from them.

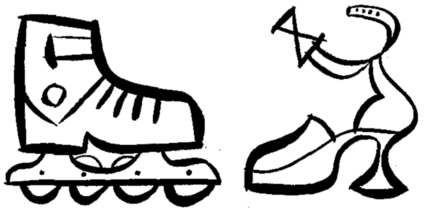
On al-Mutanabi Street, in Baghdad's old Jewish quarter, where men gather to buy and sell books every Friday, I met Sabah Mikhail, an Armenian Christian, who told me that before the Gulf War he was a teacher and an art critic. Now he sells books for a living, and no longer writes because he doesn't have the time, or the necessary concentration. "It's like they say: 'If my shoes are too tight, I can't think well,' " Mikhail said. "As for me, I think it's not just my shoes that are tight. My mind is narrower too."

"Everyone is affected," Sa'ad Naji al-Jawad, a British-educated professor of political science at Baghdad University, told me. His salary had once been the equivalent of about seven hundred dollars a month, but it was now worth only twenty-five. Jawad is from an affluent Baghdadi family, and he doesn't depend on his professor's salary, but many of his less fortunate colleagues have been forced to emigrate in order to earn enough money to support their families. And, despite his privileged status, Jawad had also experienced the effect of sanctions first hand. A couple of months earlier, he had had an emergency operation. "There was a suspicion of colon cancer, which turned out to be false, thank God. But even after discounts from the doctor, who is a personal friend of mine, the operation cost me the equivalent of five years' salary. And, as it was, I still had to buy the medicine I needed on the black market. If I didn't come from a well-to-do family, this would have been impossible." Before 1990, he explained, his operation would have been paid for by the state, and there was no shortage of medicines in the pharmacies. "Iraq had the best health-care system in the Middle East. Now we pray for our children not to catch an illness for which there is no treatment here."

"What we have done with the sanctions," a Western diplomat said to me a few days later, "is to make the élite richer, destroy the middle class, impoverish the people, and hand the Iraqi population over to Saddam Hussein on a platter. That is what we have achieved."

The leukemia ward at the Saddam Central State Teaching Hospital for Children is dirty and full of flies. The Iraqis were very eager for me to visit, since it is a showpiece for the humanitarian argument against sanctions. Dr. Basim al-Abdili, a thin, careworn doctor who escorted me around, explained that it is known among his colleagues as the Ward of Death because of its ninety-seven-per-cent mortality rate. The antibiotics and the diagnostic and blood-transfusion equipment needed to treat the children were not available. "We have requested these things from the U.N., but they have not sent them to us. They just send whatever they like." I asked Dr. al-Abdili what the normal survival rate was for children with leukemia. "In your country, about eighty per cent," he said. "Here there is no cure."

We stood beside the bed of a shirtless young boy who was sitting up, staring blankly in front of him. His mother touched the small of his back protectively. Dr. al-Abdili read from the boy's medical chart in a flat voice: "He is Omar, four years old, from al-Ambar, west of Baghdad. He's blind. It happened one week ago. We believe this is caused by metastasis of the tumor affecting his brain and nervous system. There is now uncontrolled spread. The blindness is irreversible." Omar's mother stared up at me with what looked like an expectant expression on her face. It would be too much to say that she looked hopeful. But I couldn't stand it and averted my gaze.



We moved on. In the next bed lay a four-year-old girl, Bushra Abdel Hassan. She wore a cheap orange dress, and she was all bones and withered limbs. Intravenous tubes led into needles that were taped to her blotchy, sticklike arms. Bushra looked as though she should be dead already, but she was, horribly, still alive. She stared at her skeletal hands, which she held up in the air in front of her face, one hand playing with the dirty nails of the other. Bushra's father, a man in his thirties who appeared to be in a state of emotion that was beyond tears, crouched next to her bed and held his head close to hers, whispering to her.

Dr. al-Abdili directed my attention to a piece of paper that was taped to the window above Bushra's head. It was covered in green lettering, a child's scrawl, and was decorated with little red flowers. He translated it for me: "It says, 'How long will these sanctions last and the killing of children go on? May the health of Iraq's children get better!' " The message, Dr. al-Abdili said, had been written by Usama Ismael, a young boy who had died three months earlier. It seemed like rather heavy-handed anti-American propaganda, and I assumed that it had been arranged for the benefit of visiting journalists, but after the tour of the dying children it was hard to muster the appropriate skepticism.

When I told a U.N. official about my visit to the children's hospital, he confirmed gloomily that the kind of health-care equipment needed to treat Iraq's leukemia victims was on the U.N. sanctions committee's prohibited list. "Pretty much anything to do with nuclear medicine or involving radiation is banned, for all the obvious reasons," he said. "There's no question that the Iraqis could pay for the needed medicines, medical equipment, and foodstuffs, but they leave the situation as it is because it serves the regime's interests to bash away at the sanctions. And the Americans keep the sanctions in place so as to be able to blame Iraq for not doing enough. Both sides are using the Iraqi people, who are the ones paying the price for this. It's an utterly cynical game."

At the end of November, the U.N.

announced that there would be meetings with the Iraqis in January, after Ramadan, to discuss a way out of the impasse over sanctions and weapons inspections, but Tariq Aziz said bluntly that Iraq would not accept the inspection team that has been trained to replace UNSCOM.

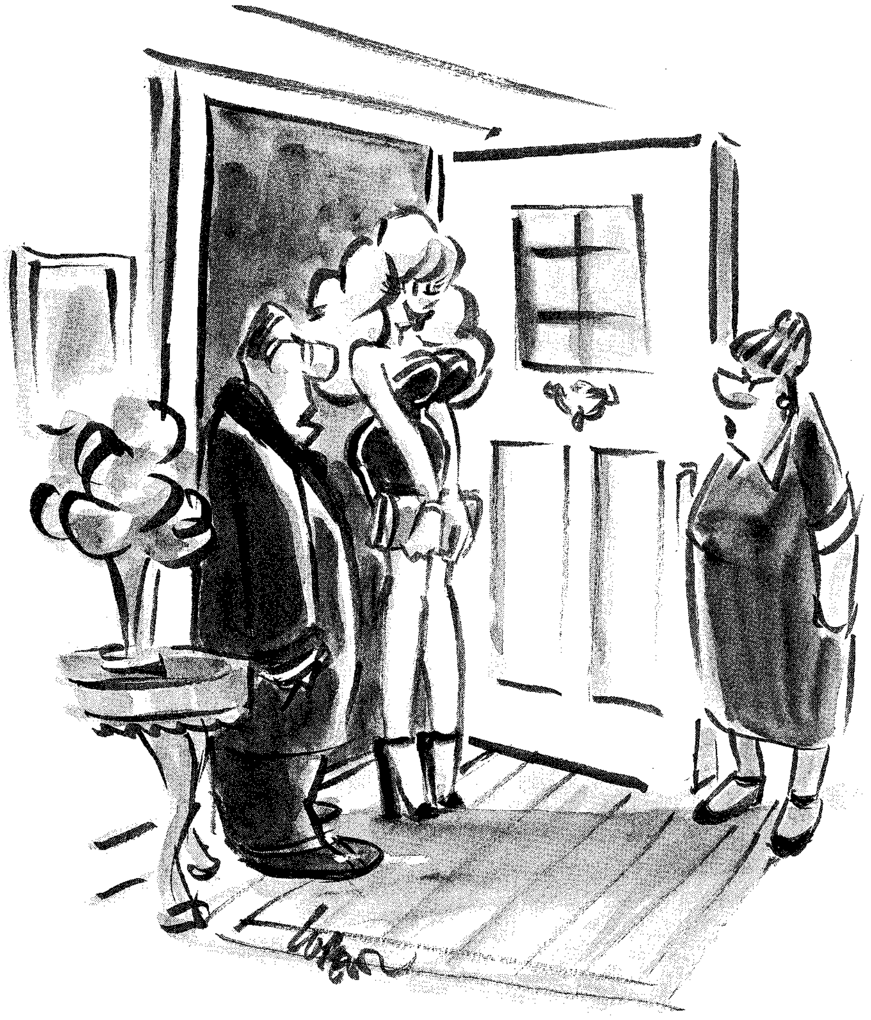
The United States, curiously, has a representative in Baghdad. He is Ryszard Krystosik, a career Polish diplomat who for the past six years has served as Minister Plenipotentiary and Head of the United States Interests Section in Iraq. Krystosik is a trim man in his mid-sixties. He picked me up for lunch one day, wearing a fine navy-blue suit and a striped tie, and we drove to a gated residence with a small security-guard hut outside. The guard let us through the gate, and Krystosik excused himself while he went around to the back of the house to open up.

We were completely alone. For the next several hours—during an elaborate lunch at a long, glossy dining-room table set with good silver and a full complement of crystal engraved with the American bald eagle—Krystosik would disappear every so often and reappear a few minutes later carrying a new dish. When I commented on his U.S.-government-issue glassware, Krystosik explained that everything in the house—the crystal, the furniture, the Persian carpets on the floor, and the indifferent art—had come from the residence of the last U.S. ambassador, April Glaspie, who left Iraq a few days before the invasion of Kuwait. The American presence in Iraq, such as it was, consisted only of Krystosik.

In his youth, in the sixties, Krystosik was one of the first Polish exchange students to study at Princeton, where he was a graduate student at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. During Poland's transition from Communism to democracy, he served as his country's ambassador to Washington. In 1994, he was asked to take the job in Iraq. The long assignment, Krystosik acknowledged, has not been an easy one. He and his wife, who lives in Warsaw, have been able to see one another only twice a year. I asked him if he felt isolated. On the contrary, he said. It was true that he could not attend the usual Iraqi government functions, but he went to the receptions and dinner parties offered by his fellow-diplomats, and stayed in touch with things that way. Since the U.S. and Iraq had no diplomatic relations, he had to be extra cautious about appearances; he could not be photographed talking or shaking hands with Iraqi officials, for instance, which was something the Iraqis were always trying to orchestrate. He was particularly careful, he said, not to step on the unflattering mosaic portrait of former President George Bush with the message "Bush Is Criminal," which is set into the marble floor of the entrance to the Al-Rashid Hotel.

"No doubt you get the picture that everything here is fine, that the regime is resisting," Krystosik said. "But this is inaccurate insofar as what lies under the surface." I told him that other people had described the sanctions as unworkable, but I assumed he disagreed with them. "Yes," he said. "The sanctions are working, to a certain extent." The point is, he said, that although people tend to think of Saddam's regime as "monolithic, impregnable, it's not." The economic conditions for Iraqis were bad, and had not substantially improved in recent years. Iraq's military forces had been on alert constantly since the end of 1997, and they were weary; many of the troops were still dispersed, and living in poor conditions out in the desert. "They've been there a long time," Krystosik said. "So there must be some who think enough is enough. And Saddam knows this. It is his weak point."

After lunch, Krystosik said he wanted to show me something, and motioned me to follow him upstairs. He opened the door to a small office—a little corner of America in Baghdad. A bookcase



"For Pete's sake, Lucille, lighten up—it's only a sleepover."

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IN THE EMBARRASSMENT CEMETERY
JANE L.
MOM ASKED BRASSIERE-RELATED QUESTION IN FRONT OF DAD
DIED ON THE SPOT
1954 - 1966
BRAD K.
QUERIED MERELY OVERWEIGHT PERSON ABOUT HER "DUE DATE"
GROUND OPENED UP AND SWALLOWED HIM
1959 - 1992
LUCY P.
HAD ANXIETY ATTACK ON OUTWARD BOUND EXPERIENCE
HAD TO BE RESCUED BY HELICOPTER
NEVER RECOVERED
1965 - 1998

against one wall was filled with volumes by Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. The walls were covered with framed photographs, including some inscribed to Krystosik from George Bush, Madeleine Albright, and Bill Clinton. One photograph showed him and his wife with the Bush family. His office was the only room in the house, Krystosik explained, that he had allowed himself to give a personal touch to. He took me over to a cabinet that held several revolvers. He collected them as a hobby. Picking up one venerable-looking gun with a long barrel, he explained that it was a genuine eighteen-seventies Peacemaker, of the type used in the American West. He handed it to me. "Try to cock it," he urged. Struggling, I barely managed to pull back the hammer using both hands. "You see? It's not easy, like they show in the cowboy movies, is it?"

A trip was organized so that I could visit Tikrit and the nearby village of Owja, the President's birthplace. It was the first time since before the Gulf War, I was told, that a foreign journalist had been permitted into Owja, which is officially a "closed area."

In Tikrit, the provincial governor, General Tarek Faizi al-Haaza, a heavy-set man who wore a beret, greeted me from behind a large desk on which there were eight telephones. A photograph of him sitting with Saddam, taken the day Saddam swam the Tigris three times, hung on the wall behind him. After some stiffly polite chitchat, I was swept out of the building in a swarm of security men and local Baath Party cadres and driven off in a motorcade. About twenty minutes later, we turned off the main highway and followed a narrow road past small farms and date-palm groves. We came to a halt before a group of mud hovels. A wall surrounded the President's birthplace, which consisted of a dirt patio and two rooms, one for people and the other for animals. The roof of one of the rooms had caved in. I asked my companions why the building had not been restored. "By order of the President, it is kept as it is," one of them said. In the yard of an identical but still inhabited mud dwelling next door, a cow was eating hay, and a small patch of sunflowers grew among the weeds. As we drove off down the road, we passed the neighbor, a strong-looking man in a gray dish-dash robe. He had been working in the fields and was returning home on foot, carrying a cudgel. He stolidly ignored us. His wife walked a few feet behind him, alongside a young child. They didn't look at us either. The wife wore a long black robe, and she was carrying a stack of freshly cut reeds on her head.

The area was referred to as Old Owja, my escorts explained. About a mile farther on, we passed an oblong adobe-brick house where Saddam's uncle Khairallah Tulfah had lived. When Saddam was a young child, Khairallah was a soldier and participated in the abortive 1941 uprising by pro-Nazi Army officers against the Iraqi monarchy. Afterward, Khairallah was cashiered from the Army and imprisoned for several years. When he was released and returned home, Saddam went to live with him and began going to school. Until then, Saddam had lived unhappily with his mother and stepfather, a brutish, illiterate farmer who bullied him. Under Khairallah's tutelage, Saddam became politicized, and he adopted his uncle's nationalist views. Saddam repaid Khairallah for his early patronage by making him the mayor of Baghdad, but he was so corrupt that eventually Saddam had to kick him out of the job. Shortly afterward, Khairallah contributed to Iraq's literary patrimony by publishing a monograph he had written, entitled "Three Whom God Should Not Have Created: Persians, Jews, and Flies."

A mile or so past Khairallah's house, we came to a forested area, where I saw a domed mansion partially concealed behind the sort of high exterior walls that surround all Saddam's palaces. Everyone in my vehicle fell silent. The road climbed up a bluff and onto a plateau, and, suddenly, we were driving through a neighborhood of mansions and medium-sized palaces. I asked my escorts where we were. "*New* Owja," one of them said.

Back in Tikrit, I was taken to meet Numan Abdul Ghani Ruhayem, a man of eighty-five, who had been Saddam's fifth-grade English teacher. Ghani Ruhayem's home overlooks a reedy bend in the Tigris, and I counted three more palaces there. The old teacher must have been told to dress up for my visit, and he met me wearing a gold-trimmed muslin robe over a freshly ironed white dishdash and a head scarf held in place with a black head ring. Saddam, Ghani Ruhayem told me, had been one of his best students, a "very proud" boy, interested in history. "Saddam was fond of an Egyptian poem about the bravery of the Syrian troops in battle with the French," the teacher recalled. "He was always talking about this poem, I remember—a poem that encourages Arab unity and gives warriors heart in battle. Even at that age, he was obviously predestined to become a leader."

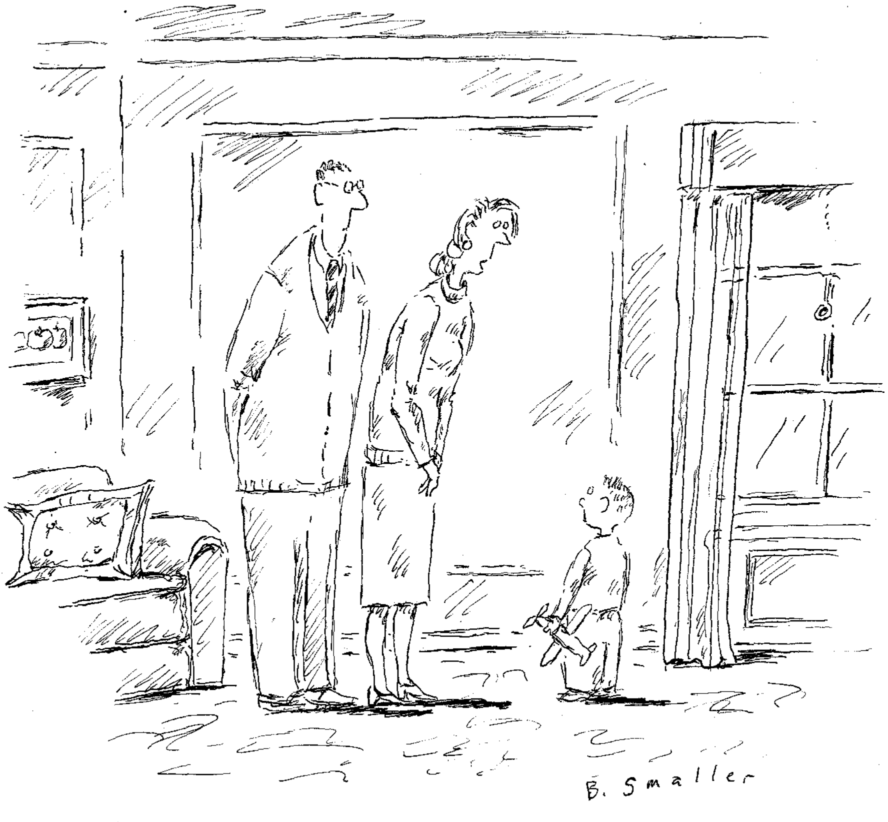
Our next stop was the Tikrit Secondary School for Boys. The headmaster went running off purposefully when my companions ordered him to bring me Saddam's grade book. He returned a few minutes later, looking flustered, and handed me the book, which was covered in plastic. I saw that in the 1953-54 school year, Saddam's first year of intermediate school, he had scored a middling C average. His highest grade, ninety out of a hundred, was in History, followed by Sports (eighty-five), and Science and Geometry (seventy-four in both). He had done rather less well in Drawing (seventy) and Arabic (sixty-nine). His worst grades were in Math (sixty-six) and, despite what his old teacher had told me, in English and Geography—with a lacklustre sixty-five in each. "He did very well in History," remarked one of the escorts loyally. They all nodded their heads.

We drove out to the desert just west of Tikrit and stopped beside the road, apparently waiting for something. The sun beat down, and no traffic passed, except for a pickup truck crammed with longhaired sheep. Eventually, a shiny gray Volvo sedan drove up, and a fit-looking man in his late forties got out and joined us. He was Muhammad Rijb, Saddam's security chief in Tikrit. Rijb smirked and swaggered. He was wearing gold-rimmed aviator sunglasses, two-tone loafers, a silky dress shirt, and green slacks, and he had a revolver hanging from his belt. I spotted a new Chinese AK-47 in the front seat of his car. Rijb came over, shook my hand, and led the way to a deep pit in the sand. Holding me back from the edge protectively, he told us that this was the famous well where, in 1959, Saddam concealed himself during his flight into exile after he attempted to kill Abd al-Karim Qassim, the general who had recently become President and who was considered insufficiently Pan-Arab by Saddam and his Baath Party friends. The well belonged to Rijb's father, who owned all the land thereabouts. "There are those who believe it was a different well where Saddam hid himself, but this is the real one," Rijb declared. He looked truculent. Everyone stood staring respectfully into the well for a few more moments, and then we left.

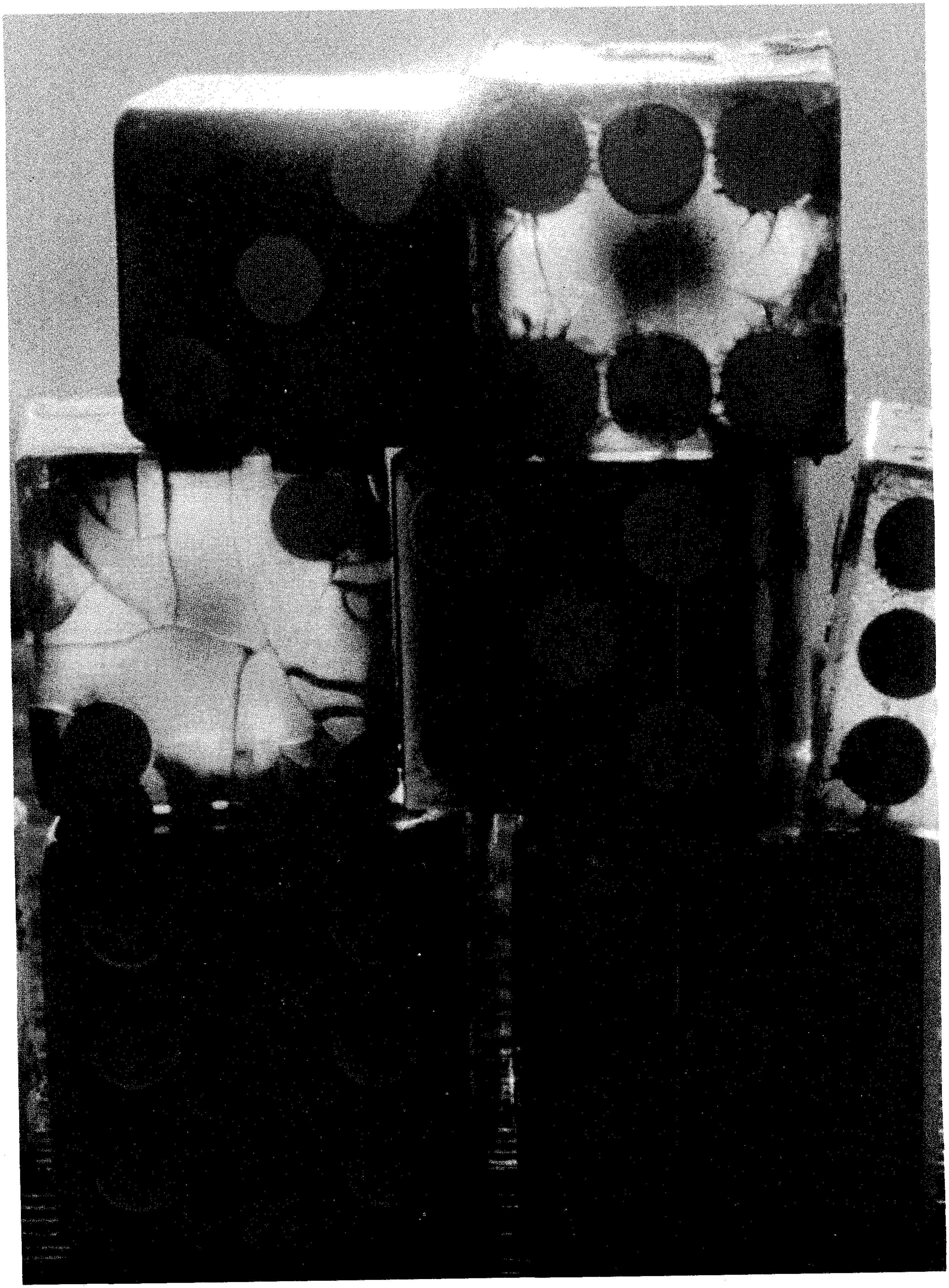
My tour ended at a hotel on the outskirts of Tikrit, near the walls of one of Saddam's palaces. The governor arrived with an entourage of soldiers, who fanned out as he and Rijb waved me through the foyer to a big room where a long table was piled high with bowls of lamb, rice, whole river carp cooked in various ways, and salads. Attendants in white jackets stood in a line against the wall, their hands clasped deferentially in front of them. It was a banquet prepared specially for me.

We were joined by four men in their sixties. Three of them were dressed in robes and head scarves, and one wore an ill-fitting three-piece suit. They were introduced to me as Saddam's boyhood chums from the Tikrit Secondary School for Boys. All of them were retired schoolteachers. Sabir Jassim, the one in the suit, explained that in the old days Tikriti boys who left the farm and received a high-school education either became teachers or joined the Army. "When we were boys," Jassim said, "we used to talk about our dreams for the future. Most of us said we wanted to become teachers. Saddam talked about ending Iraq's poverty and backwardness. He was very anti-colonialist, especially after the British installed the Jews in the Palestinian homeland."

When lunch was over and I was preparing to leave, Jassim tugged my arm and leaned toward me. "You know," he said in a friendly, emphatic way, "Saddam really is a very simple man. He's the kind of man who asks you how many children you have when you meet him. To know him is to love him." ♦



"Your father loves me very much, in his own way, and I love your father very much, in my own way, and that's why we're getting a divorce."



ANNALS OF GAMING

THE STORY OF DICE

Gambling and death from ancient Egypt to Los Angeles.

BY RICKY JAY

I. DICE IN A BOTTLE

In 1984, a small pewter container was found embedded in silt on the north bank of the Thames near London Bridge. It was located by a metal detector wielded by a modern mudlark, a slang term first defined in the eighteenth century as a fellow who scoured the waterside for trinkets. These early mudlarks were accused of conspiring with ship stevedores who knowingly jettisoned cargo into the river for subsequent retrieval and a share of the profits. Today, the Society of Thames Mudlarks is a respected organization licensed by the Port of London Authority. The group has retrieved many thousands of items, ranging from belt buckles to coins to a seventeeth-century royal ring.

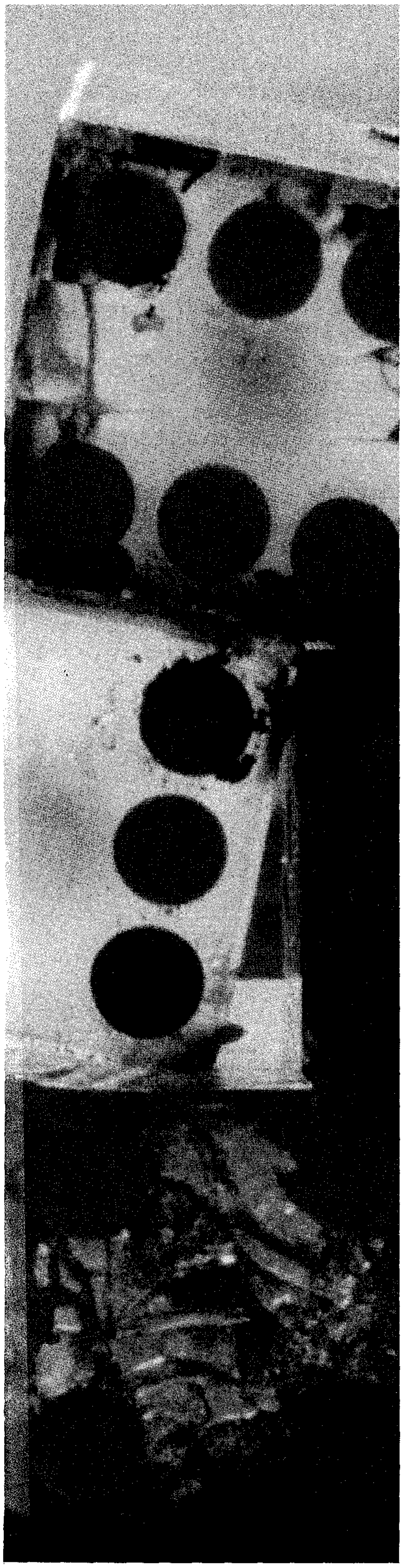
The receptacle unearthed from the silt was emblazoned with a double-headed eagle set within a shield. Antiquarians concluded that it was a feeding trough from a late-fifteenth-century birdcage. Instead of holding seeds, however, this particular model contained twenty-four bone dice. It has not been determined if the trough was used as a cup or a box from which the dice were thrown. That the dice were the kit of a hustler was confirmed, as every die was constructed or modified for cheating. X-rays revealed that eighteen of the dice had been drilled out and weighted with quicksilver. Shakespeare would have called these dice "fulhams," after the Thames-side community that was rumored to be the seat of a brisk trade in illicit dicing. Eleven of the dice were set to favor fives and sixes, and these had been neatly injected with three small veins of mercury; the others had been infused with two veins, and favored the ace and the deuce.

The remaining six cubes were misspotted. Three were called "high men" and were marked only with the numbers four, five, and six, each repeated twice (no more than three surfaces of a die are visible at one time). The others, "low men," had only one, two, or three spots. The trough had been squeezed shut to make an airtight seal, after which a hustler in jeopardy likely pitched it into the Thames to thwart detection. The vessel and the dice are housed at the Museum of London.

II. THE ORIGINS OF DICE

God invented dice. So says Plato, who attributes their conception to the Egyptian deity Theuth. Another tale touts Palamedes, the Greek hero of the Trojan War. His sagacity was legendary, and he was said to have invented such diurnal necessities as dicing and eating at regular intervals. He encouraged soldiers to relieve the boredom of the siege of Troy by throwing the bones. Herodotus attributes the discovery of dice to the practical Lydians: to palliate widespread famine, they would eat only every other day and gamble on the fast days.

Almost all early civilizations were interested in chance and divination, a formidable combination that paved the way for high-stakes gambling and philosophical rumination. The direct precursors of dice were astragali—the heel bones of hoofed quadrupeds, which articulate with the tibia and help form the ankle joint. They are six-sided, with four flat sides; the flat sides alone seem to have been used for gaming. Astragali were employed in board games of the Egyptians perhaps as early as 3500 B.C. While sheep were the most com-



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROSAMOND PURCELL

Older celluloid dice remain stable for decades, then cleave, crumble, and implode.

mon providers of these gaming implements, the astragali of antelope were prized for their elegance.

III. DIGGING FOR DICE

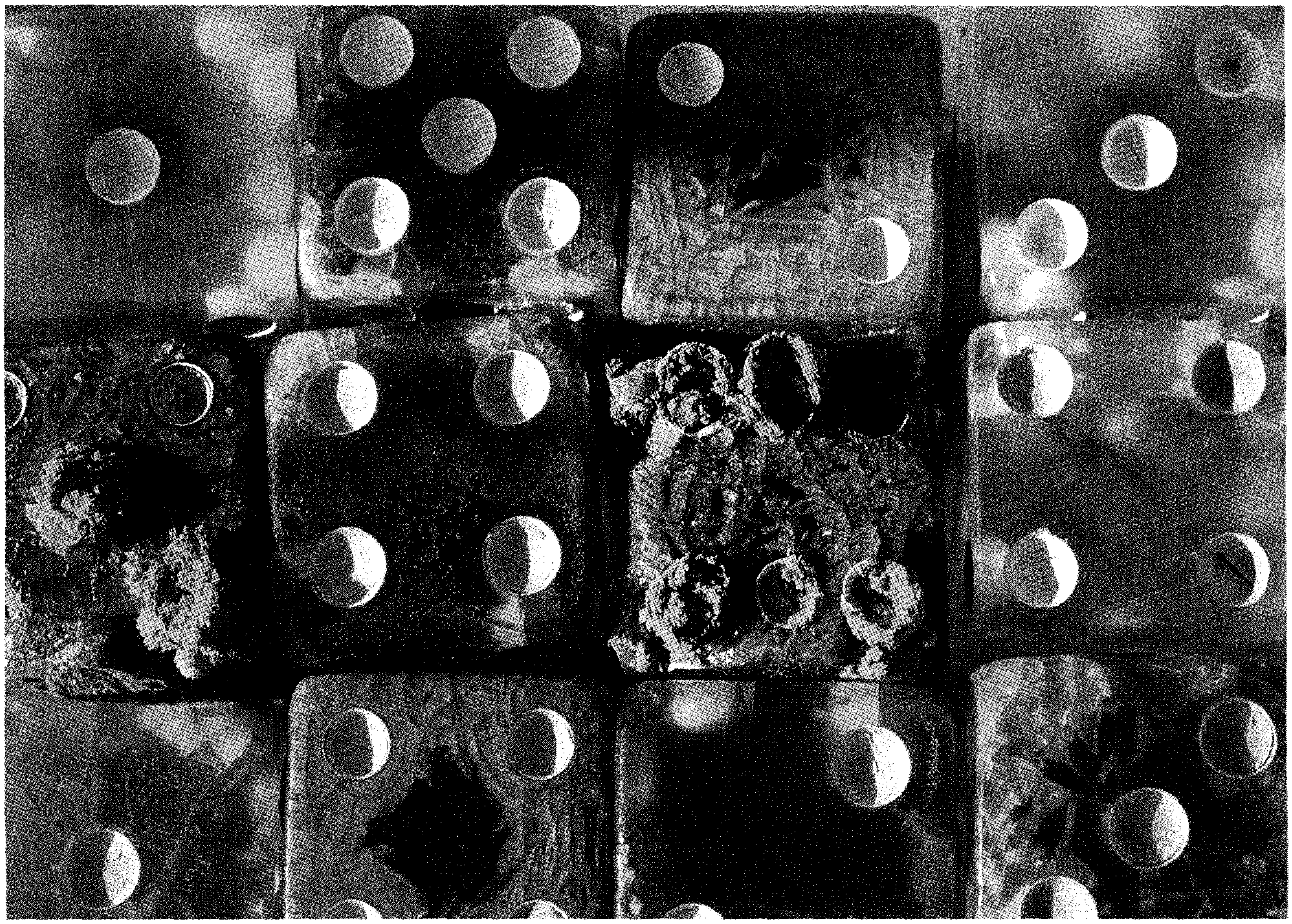
Amid the detritus under the mounds of ash, soot, and dirt excavated at Pompeii and Herculaneum were found dice. Two major gambling histories published in the nineteenth century claim that these dice were "loaded," weighted to make certain numbers appear more frequently than chance or statistics dictate. Yet, among scores of classical citations, neither tome gives a specific source for this information. One book reports that the dice were found at Pompeii, the other says Herculaneum. And few details are given: Were the dice crafted of bone, wood, or ivory? Were the loads made of lead, gold, or quicksilver? Who found them? Was it a dice player, an archeologist—or a dice-playing archeologist—who detected their unnatural bias? The tale is repeated in many other works, but none give a credible provenance for the doctored dice.

Even if the story is apocryphal, even if the dice were not loaded, those used by avid Roman gamblers contained a built-in potential for cheating. Casinos now demand a product machined to within a ten-thousandth of an inch on each side. But, in an age long before the invention of the micrometer, how could the cubes be perfectly square? The natural imperfections of dice fashioned by hand might have been used to advantage by ancient gamesters.

The Romans were fond of dice: Augustus, Domitian, Commodus, Caligula, and Nero were all inveterate players. Claudius, a flamboyant gambler, wrote a treatise on how to win at dice, which has unfortunately not survived, but the extent of his passion for gaming may be deduced from a feature of his chariot: a specially constructed board stabilized for play on the roughest rural roads of the empire. He is said to have wagered four hundred thousand sesterces, a fortune even by regal standards, on a single roll of the dice. For this indiscretion Seneca relegates the Emperor to a Sisyphean gamester's hell: condemned eternally to pick up the bones and throw them into a dice cup that has no bottom.

IV. DIVINE DICING

Olaf Haraldsson, an eleventh-century king of Norway, metamorphosed from a Viking warrior to a Christian saint. Dubbed Olaf the Thick (a characterization based on corpulence rather than lack of cunning), he wagered a kingdom in a game of dice. Not even the healing waters that were said to spout from his grave can match the miraculous tale of the broken dice. King Olaf and the king of Sweden were gambling over competing claims to the island of Hising. The Swede rolled the highest possible score, two sixes, and arrogantly suggested that there was no need for Olaf to take his turn. "Although these be two sixes on the dice, it would be easy, sire, for God to let them turn up again in my favor!" Olaf



Dice from the author's collection. Casinos now insist on dice evenly machined to a ten-thousandth of an inch; for centuries, gamesters exploited imbalances. In medieval Germany, users of false dice had their hands cut off; people who made them had their eyes put out.

insisted, basking in the self-confidence of his recent conversion. He then cast two sixes. The Swede again threw two sixes, and so, again, did Olaf—but at the end of this roll one of the dice split in two. Both a six and an ace landed face up, yielding an unprecedented roll of thirteen.

V. THE TRUE PRACTICE OF FALSEHOOD

In the sixteenth century, dicing was virtually synonymous with cheating. Robert Greene, the colorful Elizabethan pamphleteer who called Shakespeare an "upstart crow," and who expired ignominiously after a surfeit of pickled herring, defined Cheating Law as "play at false dice." A famous treatise on archery, "Toxophilus," published in 1545 by Roger Ascham, who was the classics instructor to the Tudor monarchs, is the improbable source of the earliest serious discussion of false dice in English. Ascham enumerates a variety of ways in which a cheater may alter the dice to his advantage, and documents a diabolical scam: If a pigeon is winning honestly, a crook switches false dice into the game; the sucker unwittingly throws them, and the crook accuses the honest player of cheating.

A more conscientious discussion of the methods and language of the dice hustler appears in "A Manifest Detection of the most vile and detestable use of Dice-play," issued in about 1552, and attributed to a Gilbert Walker, about whom nothing is known. The advantageous alteration of dice is analyzed in fourteen exotic variants, couched in the canting language of cheaters: A hustler's kit could include a bale or two of fulhams, high men, low men, "gourds," "light graviers," "demies," or "contraries." "Bristle dice," which were affixed with boar's hair, had become too well known "to get the money," or, as Walker puts it, were "now too gross a practice to be put in use."

VI. MATTHEW BUCHINGER

Sometimes the man rather than the dice was disfigured, as in the case of Matthew Buchinger, born in Germany in 1674. The Little Man of Nuremberg was only twenty-nine inches tall and had no arms or legs but was blessed with remarkable skills. With his stumps he performed a variety of conjuring effects, played musical instruments, and produced miniature calligraphy. His prowess at manipulating the bones undetected and fleecing his opponents is recorded in a broadside from 1726 entitled "A Poem on Mathew Buckinger, The Greatest German Living":

> He throws the Dice as careless down
> As any Gamester in the Town.
> And tho' the Number cast be three
> Two sixes you shall ever see.

VII. THE PRICE OF DICE

According to Gilbert Walker, in sixteenth-century London false dice could readily be obtained in the prisons of Marshalsea or King's Bench. The labor of good professionals, though, was always at a premium. Walker extolled the workmanship of Bird of Holborn, the first such craftsman known by name. Poor manufacture was easily de-

"What if it turns out you're not even a late bloomer?"

• •

tected. The anonymous author of "The Whole Art and Mystery of Modern Gaming fully Expos'd and Detected" (1726), claimed that shaved dice were "made always proportionable to the Impudence of the Operator; for you must know, there are some made so very strong, that you may discover them as soon as put upon the Table; a modest Man takes more Caution."

One of the most impudent operators was an Italian advantage player named Pimentel, who enjoyed great success in France during the reign of Henry IV. The court was in the midst of a veritable gambling craze, and it was rumored that Pimentel's good fortune was sanctioned at the highest level, the King believing that the impoverishment of his courtiers strengthened the monarchy. Pimentel managed to purchase the entire stock of dice in Paris, and he then had an accomplice provide a new shipment at unusually low prices. The merchants and eventually the gamesters who purchased the dice became unwitting accomplices of the Italian: they did not realize that every cube had been doctored to his specifications. There was scarcely a game in Paris that did not play into the hands of this *chevalier d'industrie*.

Such objects of deception are still offered for sale, often under the guise of conjuring supplies sold "for entertainment purposes only." A handyman hustler in the nineteen-forties did not have to rely on shop-crafted wares but could fashion his own false dice with the equipment outlined in a catalogue issued by a Los Angeles firm:

> We are supplying a Special Selected Outfit that is complete for those wishing to do their own work. The outfit consists of one hand drill, one vice, four sizes of straight drills, three burrs for hollowing, celluloid rope for plugging, one bottle of cement, white and black dice ink, one box of amalgam, one bottle of mercury, four finishing drills for spots, adjustable spot spacer, polishing compound, fast cutting sand for shaping and corner work, file, sample of three dice, drilled and hollowed to show just how work should be done for perfect balance. Instruction with each item to show best way to handle.
>
> Dice Makers Outfit, complete $18.00

VIII. REDRESS AND RETRIBUTION

The manufacture and use of illicit dice might seem more an inevitability than a temptation. In England, there are court records as early as the fourteenth century citing the prosecution of men for using doctored dice. One convicted man was forced to endure the indignity of the pillory with his false dice strung about his neck. Punishments were often severe, nonetheless, and could be harder on the producers than on the players. The German legal compendium of the thirteenth century known as the "Mirror of Saxony" records that citizens possessing false dice were publicly scourged. Those caught using false dice had their hands cut off, and those who fabricated false dice—considered the greatest malefactors—had their eyes put out so that they could never make such offending objects again.

IX. DICE AND DEITY

God kills with dice. In 1714, Theophilus Lucas, the author of "Lives of the Gamesters," related the tale of three Swiss gamblers who defied God by playing on the Sabbath. As one man cast the dice, he exclaimed that if fortune failed him he "would thrust his Dagger into the very Body of God, as far as he could." Upon losing his throw, he hurled his dirk toward the heavens. The dagger disappeared in midair, and several drops of blood landed on the table in front of the frightened gamblers. For this blasphemy, the Devil instantly carried the wretch away, "with such a Noise and Stink that the whole city was amaz'd at it." The townspeople captured and chained another of the dicers, who was struck dead en route to the prison. The third was put to death by the citizens, who made a monument of the gaming table as an object lesson on the evils of gambling and the judgment of God.

X. BLASPHEMY: ANCIENT AND MODERN

Sacrilege also proved fatal in the case of a Florentine nobleman, Antonio Rinaldeschi. In 1501, he wagered and lost a considerable sum on a roll of the dice. According to aghast witnesses, he stood up, cursed the name of the Virgin, and departed the Fig Tree Tavern; then, passing the church of Santa Maria de Ricci, he picked up a handful of horse dung, which he hurled at a fresco of the Madonna. The missile remained affixed to the effigy, just above the nape of her neck. The resulting outcry anticipated by five hundred years the furor surrounding the exhibition of Chris Ofili's "The Holy Virgin Mary," which featured a black Madonna with breasts rendered from dry elephant dung—but the fate of that artist was not as dire as that of Rinaldeschi. When the Florentine was apprehended, according to a recent article by William J. Connell and Giles Constable, he tried to commit suicide by stabbing himself with a dagger. The gamester, however, survived his own attack. In protective custody, he was escorted away from a lynch mob. He confessed, both to a magistrate and to a priest, received absolution, and, later the same evening, was hanged.

XI. DICE AND DEATH

In the first century, Tacitus wrote that among the Germanic hordes men earned their destinies as slaves or freemen by throwing the bones. In an example of rough justice from ancient Persia, a woman wagers against the king for the life of a subject. After a favorable roll, she claims her prize and then has him put to death for having decapitated her son.

The tales of gamblers driven to suicide by bad fortune at dice are legion. The Reverend Charles Caleb Colton, in "Lacon, or many Things in few Words addressed to those who think" (1820), writes, "The gamester, if he die a martyr to his profession, is doubly ruined. He adds his soul to every other loss, and by the act of suicide renounces earth to forfeit heaven." This very Colton, who was far more renowned as a gambler than as a divine (he is said to have won and eventually lost twenty-five thousand pounds in the gambling salons of the Palais Royal), took his own life.

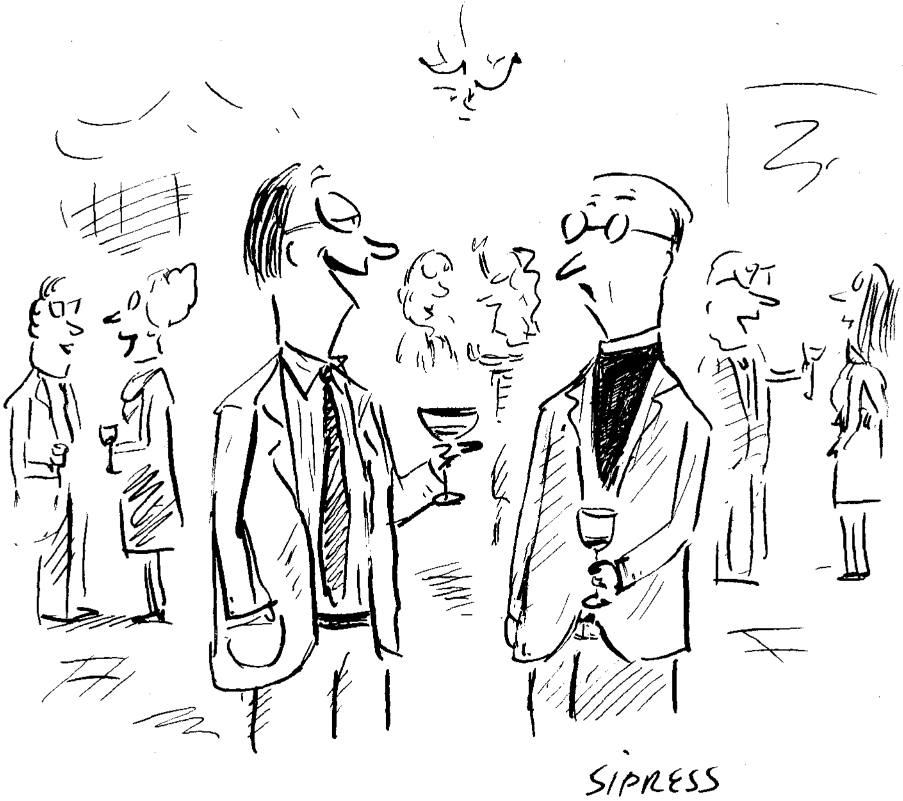
XII. WHEN A DIE DIES

I have accumulated thousands of dice over a period of decades. They are of myriad size, shape, and color, and of daunting variety: bird's-eye, bull's-eye, doughnut, barbudi, poker, baseball, golf, crown and anchor, bell and hammer, drugstore, razor, brushed, feathered, juice, weight, hits, missouts, tops, shapes, polyhedrons, teetotums, and rough-cut unnumbered cubes. They come from diverse sources: generous friends, dealers in collectibles, distraught gamblers ready to embrace a new calling. They are fabricated from different materials, but the vast majority are made of celluloid.

In 1868, in Albany, New York, John Wesley Hyatt formed a substance from a homogeneous colloidal dispersion of nitric acid, sulphuric acid, cotton fibres, and camphor. It was of great tensile strength, capable of resisting the effects of water, oils, and even diluted acids. Hyatt's brother called it celluloid, and it became the first commercially successful synthetic plastic. It was cost-effective to manufacture and could be produced in a variety of colors. Heated until soft and molded into shapes, it became a substitute for products made of ivory, tortoiseshell, and horn. Perhaps it is best known for its use in motion-picture film, where its volatility has resulted in the loss of a vast percentage of early footage. But it was also used to fashion removable collars, collar stays, knife handles, guitar picks, piano keys, billiard balls, and, of course, dice.

These cellulose-nitrate dice, the industry standard until the middle of the twentieth century (when the substance was replaced with less flammable cellulose acetate), typically remain stable for decades. Then, in a flash, they can decompose. The crystallization begins on the corners and then spreads to the edges. Nitric acid is released, in a process called outgassing. The dice cleave, crumble, and then implode. Unpaired electrons or free radicals can abet the deterioration; the light and smog of Los Angeles, where my dice have resided for many years, are likely accomplices.

To record the death of my dice, I called the photographer Rosamond Purcell. Her studio, in Somerville, Massachusetts, is bedizened with *Wunderkammern*, conchological specimens, objets trouvés in various stages of decomposition—rescued sheets of discarded metal and weather-beaten books—that she transforms into objects of beauty. She has come to know my dice. She has scrutinized them. She has analyzed every nuance of shape and color. She has at once halted their disintegration and catalyzed their resurrection. The dice have never looked better. ♦



"I see that you work for one of those faith-based organizations."

FICTION

POST AND BEAM

BY ALICE MUNRO

Lionel was telling them how his mother had died.

She had asked for her makeup. Lionel held the mirror.

"This will take about an hour," she said.

Foundation cream, face powder, eyebrow pencil, eyeshadow, mascara, lip liner, lipstick, blusher. She was slow and shaky, but it wasn't a bad job.

"That didn't take you an hour," Lionel said.

She said, no, she hadn't meant that. She had meant, to die.

Lionel asked her if she wanted him to call his father. His father, her husband, her minister.

She said, "What for?"

She was only about five minutes off in her prediction.

They were sitting behind the house—Lorna and her husband Brendan's house—on a little terrace that looked across at Burrard Inlet and the lights of Point Grey. Lorna had met Lionel's mother just a few months before. She was a pretty little white-haired woman with a valiant charm. She'd come down to Vancouver from a town in the Rocky Mountains to see the touring Comédie Française with her son. Lionel had invited Lorna to go with them. After the performance, while Lionel was holding open his mother's blue velvet cloak, she had said to Lorna, "I am so happy to meet my son's *belle amie*."

"Let us not overdo it with the French," said Lionel.

Lorna was not even sure what that meant. Beautiful friend. Mistress?

Lionel had raised his eyebrows at her, over his mother's head. As if to say, Whatever she's come up with, it's no fault of mine.

Lionel had once been Brendan's student at the university. A raw prodigy, sixteen years old. The brightest mathematical mind Brendan had ever seen. Lorna wondered if Brendan was dramatizing this, in hindsight, because of his own unusual, almost unnatural generosity toward gifted students. Also because of the way things had turned out. Brendan had put the whole Irish package behind him—his family and his church and the sentimental songs—but he had a weakness for a tragic tale. And, sure enough, after his blazing start Lionel had suffered some sort of breakdown, had to be hospitalized, dropped out of sight. Until Brendan met him in the supermarket and discovered that he was living within a mile of their house, here in North Vancouver. Lionel had given up mathematics entirely and now worked in the publishing office of the Anglican Church.

"Come and see us," Brendan had said. Lionel looked a bit seedy and lonely. "Come and meet my wife."

Later, when Lionel reported this exchange to Lorna, he said that he'd wondered what she might be like.

"I considered you might be awful."

"Oh," said Lorna. "Why?"

"I don't know. Wives."

Lionel used to come see them in the evenings, when the children were in bed. The slight intrusions of domestic life—the cry of the baby reaching them through an open window, the scolding Brendan sometimes gave Lorna about toys left lying on the grass instead of being put back in the sandbox, his voice calling from the kitchen asking if she had remembered to buy limes for the gin-and-tonic—all seemed to cause a shiver, a tightening of Lionel's tall narrow body and intent, distrustful face. Once he sang, very softly, to the tune of "O Tannenbaum," "O married life, O married life." He smiled slightly, or Lorna thought he did, in the dark. This smile seemed to her like the smile of her four-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, when she whispered some mildly outrageous observation to her mother in a public place. A secret little smile, gratified, somewhat alarmed.

Lionel rode up the hill on his high old-fashioned bicycle—this at a time when hardly anybody but children rode bicycles. He would not have changed out of his workday outfit. Dark trousers, a white shirt that always looked grubby and worn around the cuffs and collar, a nondescript tie. When they went to see the Comédie Française, he added to this a tweed jacket that was too wide across the shoulders and too short in the sleeves. Perhaps he did not own any other clothes.

"I labor for a pittance," he said. "And not even in the vineyards of the Lord. In the diocese of the Archbishop."

He talked with his head on one side, his gaze on something beyond Lorna's head. His voice was light and quick, sometimes squeaky with a kind of nervous exhilaration. He said everything in a slightly astonished way. He told her about the office where he worked, a few blocks from the cathedral—the small high Gothic windows and varnished woodwork (to give things a churchy feeling), the hat rack and umbrella stand (which for some reason filled him with deep melancholy), the typist, Janine, and the editor of *Church News*, Mrs. Penfound. The occasionally appearing, spectral and distracted Archbishop. There was an unresolved battle over tea bags between Janine, who favored them, and Mrs. Penfound, who did not. Everybody munched on secret eats and never shared.

"For this is Hell," Lionel said, with his sly, apologetic laugh. "Nor am I out of it."

He mentioned the hospital where he had been a patient for a while and spoke of the ways it resembled the office, in the manner of secret eats. Secrets generally. But the difference was that every once in a while in the hospital they came and bound you up and took you off and plugged you in, as he put it, to the light socket.

"That was pretty interesting. In fact, it was excruciating. But I can't describe it. That is the weird part. I can remember it but not describe it."

Because of those events in the hospital, he said, he was rather short of memories. Short of details.

Lorna told him about her life before she married Brendan. About the two houses exactly alike, standing side by side in the town where she grew up. In front of them was a deep ditch called Dye Creek, because the water that ran in it was colored by the dye from the knitting factory. Behind them was a wild meadow where girls were not supposed to go. One house was where she lived with her father; in the other lived her grandmother, her Aunt Beatrice, and her cousin Polly.

Polly had no father. That was what they said and what Lorna had once truly believed. Polly had no father, in the way that a Manx cat had no tail. Aunt Beatrice had had no social life involving a man since the time of her blotted-out disgrace, and she was so finicky, so desperate about the conduct of life that it was easier to think of Polly's conception as miraculous. The only thing that Lorna had ever learned from her Aunt Beatrice was that you must always press a seam from the side, not wide open, so that the mark of the iron will not show, and that no sheer blouse should be without its slip to hide your brassiere straps.

"Oh, yes. Yes," said Lionel. He stretched out his legs as if appreciation had reached his very toes. "Now, Polly. Out of this benighted household, what is Polly like? Is she like you?"

"I think she's more . . . competent." She wondered what Lionel meant when he said "like you."

Polly was O.K., Lorna said. Full of energy and sociability, kindhearted, confident.

"Ah," said Lionel.

Lorna told him about her only memory of her mother. Lorna was downtown with her mother on a winter day. There was snow between the sidewalk and the street. She had just learned how to tell time, and she looked up at the Post Office clock and saw that the moment had come for the soap opera she and her mother listened to every day on the radio. She felt a deep concern, because she wondered what would happen to the people in the story with the radio not turned on and them not listening. It was more than concern she felt—it was horror, to think of the way things could be lost, could *not* happen, through some casual absence or chance.

And even in that memory her mother was only a hip and a shoulder in a heavy coat.

Lionel said that he could hardly get

MARGARET SARTOR, "KATHERINE IN THE PLAYHOUSE" (1989)

more of a sense of his father than that, though he was still alive. A swish of a surplice? Lionel and his mother used to make bets on how long his father could go without speaking to them. He had asked his mother once what made his father so mad, and she had answered that she really didn't know.

"I think perhaps he doesn't like his job," she said.

Lionel said, "Why doesn't he get another job?"

"Perhaps he can't think of one he'd like."

Brendan would sit down with Lorna and Lionel for a while, saying, "What are you two gabbling about?" and then, with some relief, as if he had paid his dues for the time being, he would get up, saying that he had some work to do, and go into the house. He seemed happy about their friendship, as if he had in a way foreseen it and brought it about, but their conversation made him restless.

"It's good for him to come up here and be normal for a while instead of sitting in his room," Brendan had said to Lorna. "Of course he lusts after you. Poor bugger."

He liked to say that men lusted after Lorna. Particularly when they'd been to a department party and she had been the youngest wife there. She would have been embarrassed to have anybody hear him say that, lest they think it a wishful and foolish exaggeration. But sometimes, especially if she was a little drunk, it roused her as well as Brendan to think that she might be so universally appealing. In Lionel's case, though, she was pretty sure that it was not true, and she hoped very much that Brendan would never hint at such a thing in front of him. She remembered the look that Lionel had given her over his mother's head. The disavowal, the mild warning in it.

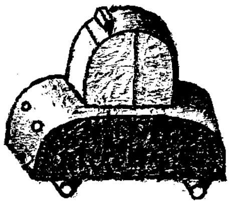
She did not tell Brendan about the poems. Once a week or so, a poem arrived, quite properly sealed and posted, in the mail. These were not anonymous—Lionel had signed them. His signature was just a squiggle, quite difficult to make out—but then so was every word of every poem. Fortunately, there were never many words—sometimes only a dozen or two in all, making a curious path across the page, like uncertain bird tracks. Lorna was a not a person unfamiliar with poetry, or a person who gave up easily on whatever she did not quickly understand. She read a lot, though she often avoided talking about what she read, for fear of making mistakes in pronunciation.

After the first poem, she agonized about what she should say. Something appreciative but not stupid. All she managed was "Thank you for the poem"—when Brendan was well out of earshot. She kept herself from saying, "I enjoyed it." Lionel gave a jerky nod and made a sound that sealed off the conversation. Poems continued to arrive, and were not mentioned again. She began to think that she could regard them as offerings, not as messages. But not love offerings—as Brendan, for instance, would assume. There was nothing in them about Lionel's feelings for her, nothing personal at all. She thought to say that they reminded her of impressions you can sometimes see on the sidewalks in spring—shadows left by wet leaves plastered there from the year before. But that might sound affected.

There was something else, more urgent, that she did not speak about to Brendan. Or to Lionel. Polly, her cousin, was coming from home.

Polly was five years older than Lorna and had worked, ever since she graduated from high school, in a bank. She was on her way across the country, by bus. To Polly it seemed the most natural and appropriate thing to do—to visit her cousin and her cousin's family. To Brendan it would seem almost certainly an intrusion, something nobody had any business doing unless invited. He was not averse to visitors—look at Lionel—but he wanted to do the choosing himself. Every day Lorna thought of how she must tell him. Every day she put it off.

And this was not a thing she could talk about to Lionel. You could not speak to him about anything seen seriously as a problem. To speak of problems meant to search for, to hope for solutions. And that was not interesting—it did not indicate an interesting attitude toward life. Rather, a shallow and tiresome hopefulness. Ordinary anxieties, uncomplicated emotions were not what he enjoyed hearing about. He preferred things to be utterly bewildering and past bearing, yet ironically, half merrily borne.



She had told him one thing that might have been chancy—how she had cried on her wedding day and during the actual wedding ceremony. But she was able to make a joke of that, by adding that she had tried to pull her hand out of Brendan's grip to get her handkerchief, but he would not let go, so she had to keep on snuffling. In fact, she had cried not because she didn't want to be married or didn't love Brendan. She had cried because everything at home suddenly seemed so precious to her—though she had always planned to leave—and the people there seemed closer to her than anyone else could ever be, though she had hidden all her private thoughts from them. She cried because she and Polly had laughed as they cleaned the kitchen shelves and scrubbed the linoleum the day before and she had pretended she was in a sentimental play and said, "Goodbye, linoleum. Goodbye, crack in the teapot. Goodbye, place under the table where I used to stick my gum. Goodbye." Polly had said, "Why don't you just tell him to forget it?" But of course she didn't mean it. She was proud, and Lorna herself was proud, eighteen years old and never had a real boyfriend and here she was marrying a good-looking thirty-year-old man, a professor.

Nevertheless she cried, and cried again when she got letters from home, in the early days of her marriage. Brendan had caught her at it, and said, "You love your family, don't you?"

She thought he sounded sympathetic. But then he sighed, and said, "I think you love them more than you love me."

She said that was not true; it was only that she felt sorry for her family sometimes. They had a hard time, her grandmother teaching fourth grade year after year, though her eyes were so bad that she could hardly see to write on the board, and Aunt Beatrice with too many nervous complaints ever to have a job, and her father—Lorna's father—working in the hardware store that wasn't even his own.

"A hard time?" said Brendan. "They've been in a concentration camp, have they?"

Then he said that people needed

gumption in this world. And Lorna lay down on the marriage bed and gave way to one of those angry weeping fits that she was now ashamed to remember. Brendan came and consoled her after a while, but still believed that she cried as women always did when they could not win the argument any other way.

Some things about Polly's looks Lorna had forgotten. How tall she was and what a long neck and narrow waist she had, and an almost perfectly flat chest. A bumpy little chin and a wry mouth. Pale skin, light-brown hair cut short, fine as feathers. She looked both frail and hardy, like a daisy on a long stalk. She wore a ruffled denim skirt with embroidery on it.

For forty-eight hours Brendan had known she was coming. She had phoned, collect, from Calgary, and he had answered the phone. He had three questions to ask afterward. His tone was distant but calm.

How long is she staying?

Why didn't you tell me?

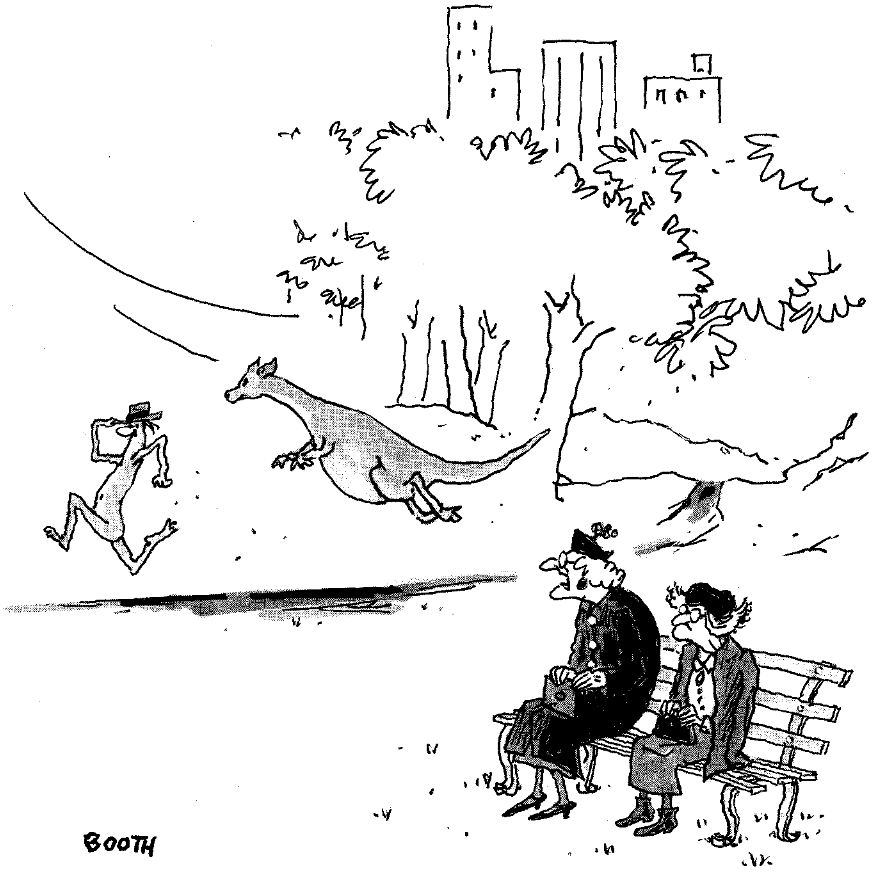
Why did she phone collect?

"I don't know," said Lorna.

Now, from the kitchen where she was preparing dinner, Lorna strained to hear what they would say to each other. Brendan had just come home. His greeting she could not hear, but Polly's voice was loud and full of a risky jollity.

"So I really started out on the wrong foot, Brendan, wait till you hear what I said. Lorna and I are walking down the street from the bus stop and I'm saying, 'Oh shoot, this is a pretty classy neighborhood you live in, Lorna'—and then I say, 'But look at that place, what's it doing here? It looks like a barn.' "

She couldn't have started out worse. Brendan was very proud of their house. It was a contemporary house, built in the West Coast style called post-and-beam. Post-and-beam houses were not painted; the idea was to fit in with the original forests. So the effect was plain and functional from the outside, with the roof flat and protruding beyond the walls. Inside, the beams were exposed and none of the wood was covered up. The fireplace in this house was set in a stone chimney that went up to the ceiling, and the windows were long and narrow and uncurtained. The architecture is always preëminent, the builder had told them, and Brendan repeated this, as well as the word "contemporary," when introducing anybody to the house for the first time.



"I love this town!"

• •

He did not bother to explain this to Polly, or to get out the magazine in which there was an article about the style, with photographs—though not of this particular house.

Polly had brought from home the habit of starting off her sentences with the name of the person she was specifically addressing. "Lorna—" she would say, or, "Brendan—" Lorna had forgotten about this way of talking. It seemed to her now rather peremptory and rude. Most of Polly's sentences at the dinner table began with "Lorna—" and were about people known only to her and Polly. Lorna knew that Polly did not intend to be rude, that she was making a strident but brave effort to seem at ease. And she had at first tried to include Brendan. Both she and Lorna had done so—they had launched into explanations of whoever it was they were talking about. But it did not work. Brendan spoke only to call Lorna's attention to something needed on the table or to point out that Daniel had spilled his mashed food on the floor.

Polly went on talking while she and Lorna cleared the table, and then as they washed the dishes. Lorna usually bathed the children and put them to bed before she started on the dishes, but tonight she was too rattled—she sensed that Polly was near tears—to attend to things in their proper order. She let Daniel crawl around on the floor while Elizabeth, with her interest in social occasions and new personalities, hung about listening to the conversation. This lasted until Daniel knocked the high chair over—fortunately not on himself, but he howled with fright—and Brendan came in from the living room.

"Bedtime seems to have been postponed," he said as he removed his son from Lorna's arms. "Elizabeth. Go and get ready for your bath."

Polly had moved on from talking about people in town to describing how things were going at home. Not well. The owner of the hardware store—a man whom Lorna's father had always spoken of as more of a friend than an employer—had sold the business without a word of what he was intending until the deed was done. The new man was expanding the store at the same time that business was being lost to Canadian Tire, and there was not a day that he did not stir up some kind of a row with Lorna's father. Lorna's father came home from the shop so discouraged that all he wanted to do was lie on the couch. He was not interested in the paper or the news. He drank bicarbonate of soda but wouldn't discuss the pains in his stomach.

Lorna mentioned a letter from her father in which he made light of these troubles.

"Well, he would, wouldn't he?" said Polly. "To you."

The upkeep of both houses, Polly said, was a continual nightmare. They should all move into one house and sell the other, but now that their grandmother had retired she picked on Aunt Beatrice—Polly's mother—all the time, and Lorna's father, Uncle Art, could not stand the idea of living with the two of them. Polly often wanted to walk out and never come back, but what would they do without her?

"You should live your own life," said Lorna. It felt strange to her to be giving advice to Polly.

"Oh, sure, sure," said Polly. "I should've got out while the going was good, that's what I guess I should have done. But when was that? I don't ever remember the going being so particularly good. I was stuck with having to see you through school first, for one thing."

Lorna had spoken in a regretful, helpful voice, but she refused to stop in her work and give Polly's news its due. She accepted it as if it concerned some people she knew and liked but was not responsible for. She thought of her father lying on the couch in the evenings, dosing himself for pains he wouldn't admit to, and Aunt Beatrice next door, worried about what people were saying about her, crying because she'd gone to church with her slip showing. To think of home caused Lorna pain, but she could not help feeling that Polly was hammering at her, trying to bring her to some capitulation, wrap her up in some intimate misery. And she was determined not to give in.

Just look at you. Look at your life. Your stainless-steel sink. Your house where the architecture is preëminent.

"If I ever went away now, I think I'd just feel too guilty," Polly said. "I couldn't stand it. I'd feel too guilty leaving them."

Of course, some people never feel guilty. Some people never feel at all.

"Quite a tale of woe you got," said Brendan, when they were lying side by side in the dark.

"It's on her mind," Lorna said.

"Just remember. We are not millionaires."

Lorna was startled. "She doesn't want money."

"Doesn't she?"

"That's not what she's telling me for."

"Don't be too sure."

She lay rigid, not answering. Then she thought of something that might put him in a better mood.

"She's only here for two weeks."

His turn not to answer.

"Don't you think she's nice-looking?"

"No."

She was about to tell him that Polly had made her wedding dress. She had planned to be married in her navy suit, but Polly had said, a few days before the wedding, "This isn't going to do." So she got out her own ice-blue high-school formal (Polly had always been more popular than Lorna; she had gone to dances) and she put in gussets of white lace and sewed on white lace sleeves. Because, she said, a bride can't do without sleeves.

But what could he have cared about that?

Lionel had gone away for a few days. His father had retired, and Lionel was helping him move from his town in the Rocky Mountains to Vancouver Island. On the day after Polly's arrival, Lorna got a letter from him. Not a poem—a real letter, though it was very short: "I dreamt that I was giving you a ride on my bicycle. We were going quite fast. You did not seem to be afraid, though perhaps you should have been. We must not feel called upon to interpret this."

Brendan had gone off early. He was teaching summer school and said he would eat breakfast at the cafeteria. Polly came out of her room as soon as he was

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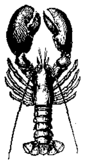

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gone. She wore slacks instead of the flounced skirt, and she smiled all the time, as if at a joke of her own. She kept ducking her head slightly to avoid Lorna's eyes.

"I better get off and see something of Vancouver," she said. "Since it isn't very likely I'll ever get here again."

Lorna marked some things on a map and gave her directions, and said she was sorry she couldn't go along, but it would be more trouble than it was worth, with the children.

"Oh. Oh, no. I wouldn't expect you to. I didn't come out here to be on your hands all the time."

Elizabeth sensed the strain in the atmosphere. She said, "Why are we trouble?"

Lorna gave Daniel an early nap, and when he woke up she got him into the stroller and told Elizabeth they were going to a playground. The playground she had chosen was not the one in a nearby park—it was down the hill, close to the street Lionel lived on. Lorna knew his address, though she had never seen the house.

It did not take her long to get there—though no doubt it would take her longer to get back, pushing the stroller uphill. But she had already passed into the older part of North Vancouver, where the houses were smaller, perched on narrow lots. The house where Lionel rented a room had his name beside one bell, and the name B. Hutchison beside the other. She knew that Mrs. Hutchison was the landlady. She pressed that bell.

"I know Lionel's away and I'm sorry to bother you," she said. "But I lent him a book—it's a library book, and now it's overdue—and I just wondered if I could run up to his apartment and see if I could find it."

The landlady said, "Well." She was an old woman with a bandanna around her head and large dark spots on her face.

"My husband and I are friends of Lionel's. My husband was his professor at college."

The word "professor" was always useful. Lorna was given the key. She parked the stroller in the shade of the house and told Elizabeth to stay and watch Daniel.

"This isn't a playground," Elizabeth said.

"I just have to run upstairs and back. Just for a minute, O.K.?"

Lionel's room had an alcove at the end of it, for a two-burner gas stove and a cupboard. No refrigerator and no sink, except for the one in the toilet. A Venetian blind stuck halfway down the window and a square of linoleum whose pattern was covered by brown paint. There was a faint smell of the gas stove, mixed with a smell of unaired heavy clothing, perspiration, and some menthol decongestant, which she accepted—hardly thinking of it and not at all disliking it—as the intimate smell of Lionel himself.

Other than that, the place gave out hardly any clues. She had come here not for any library book, of course, but to be for a moment inside the space where he lived, to breathe his air and look out of his window. The view was of other houses, probably like this one, chopped up into small spaces, on the wooded slope of the mountain. The bareness, the anonymity of the room were severely challenging. Bed, bureau, table, chair. Just the furniture that had to be provided so that the room could be advertised as furnished. Even the tan chenille bedspread must have been there when he moved in. No pictures—not even a calendar—and, most surprisingly, no books.

Things must be hidden somewhere. In the bureau drawers? She couldn't look. Not only because there was no time—she could hear Elizabeth calling her from the yard—but because the very absence of whatever might be personal made the sense of Lionel stronger. Not just the sense of his austerity and his secrets but of a watchfulness—almost as if he had set a trap and was waiting to see what she would do.

What she really wanted to do was not to investigate anymore but to sit down on the floor, in the middle of the square of linoleum. To sit for hours, not so much looking at this room as sinking into it. To stay in this room where there was nobody who knew her or wanted a thing from her. To stay here for a long, long time, growing sharper and lighter, light as a needle.

On Saturday morning, Lorna and Brendan and the children were to drive to Penticton. A graduate student had invited them to his wedding. They would stay Saturday night and all day Sunday and Sunday night as well, and

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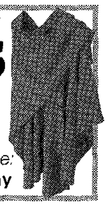

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With the winter and mud and shit roped into your wool,
Your black stick legs, blank eyes—
The farmer stumps home to his supper
And you are beyond your own bells
And my friend is in pain and there's nothing I can do,
Suffering is everywhere intense, and if
We make our own pain ourselves, who can help it? Cold selves,
Cold you, unbearable clamor and rust—

—*Jean Valentine*

leave for home on Monday morning.

"Have you told her?" Brendan said.

"It's all right. She isn't expecting to come."

"But have you told her?"

Thursday was spent at Ambleside Beach. Lorna and Polly and the children rode there on buses, changing twice, encumbered with towels, beach toys, diapers, lunch, and Elizabeth's blow-up dolphin. The physical predicaments they found themselves in, and the irritation and dismay the sight of their party roused in other passengers, brought on a peculiarly feminine reaction—a mood of near hilarity. Getting away from the house where Lorna was installed as wife was helpful, too. They reached the beach in triumph and ragtag disarray and set up their encampment, from which they took turns going into the water, minding the children, fetching soft drinks, Popsicles, French fries.

Lorna was lightly tanned, Polly not at all. She stretched a leg out beside Lorna's and said, "Look at that. Raw dough."

With all the work she had to do in the two houses, and with her job in the bank, she said, there was not a quarter hour when she was free to sit in the sun. But she spoke now matter-of-factly, without the undertone of virtue and complaint. Some sour atmosphere that had surrounded her—like old dishrags—was falling away. She had found her way around Vancouver by herself—the first time she had ever done that in a city. She had talked to strangers at bus stops and asked what sights she should see, and on somebody's advice had taken the chairlift to the top of Grouse Mountain.

As they lay on the sand, Lorna offered an explanation.

"This is a bad time of year for Brendan. Teaching summer school is really nerve-racking—you have to do so much so fast."

Polly said, "Yeah? It's not just me, then?"

"Don't be stupid. Of course it isn't you."

"Well, that's a relief. I thought he kind of hated my guts."

She then spoke of a man at home who wanted to take her out.

"He's too serious. He's looking for a wife. I guess Brendan was, too, but I guess you were in love with him."

"Was and am," said Lorna.

"Well, I don't think I am." Polly spoke with her face pressed into her elbow. "I guess it might work, though, if you liked somebody O.K. and you went out with them and made up your mind to see the good points."

"So what are the good points?" Lorna was sitting up so that she could watch Elizabeth ride the dolphin.

"Give me a couple of minutes," said Polly, giggling. "No. There's lots. I'm just being mean."

As they were rounding up toys and towels, she said, "I really wouldn't mind doing all this over again tomorrow."

"Me, neither," said Lorna. "But I have to get ready to go to the Okanagan. We're invited to this wedding." She made it sound like a chore—something she hadn't bothered speaking about till now because it was too disagreeable and boring.

Polly said, "Oh. Well, I might come back by myself then."

"Sure. You should."

"Where is the Okanagan?"

The next evening, after putting the children to bed, Lorna went into the room where Polly slept. She wanted to get a suitcase out of the closet, expecting the room to be empty—Polly, as she thought, still in the bathroom, soaking the day's sunburn in lukewarm water and soda.

But Polly was in bed, with the sheet pulled up around her like a shroud.

"You're out of the bath," said Lorna, as if she found all this quite normal. "How does your burn feel now?"

"I'm O.K.," said Polly, in a muffled voice. Lorna knew at once that she had been and probably still was weeping. She stood at the foot of the bed, not able to leave the room. A disappointment had come over her which was like sickness, a wave of disgust.

"What is it?" Lorna said. She feigned surprise, she feigned compassion.

Polly looked out at her now.

"You don't want me."

Her eyes were brimming, not just with tears and the bitter accusation of betrayal but with an outrageous demand to be welcomed, blessed, comforted.

Lorna would sooner have hit her. What gives you the right, she wanted to say. And, do you know how ugly you look? What are you leeching on to me for? What do you think I can do about Brendan? What gives you the right?

Family. Family gives Polly the right. She saved her money and planned her escape, with the idea that Lorna would take her in. That is what she must have dreamed of—staying here and never having to go back. Becoming part of Lorna's good fortune, Lorna's transformed world.

"What do you think I can do?" said Lorna, quite viciously and to her own surprise. "Do you think I have any power? He never even gives me more than a twenty-dollar bill at a time."

She dragged the suitcase out of the room.

It was all so false, putting her own lamentations forth in that way, to match Polly's. What did the twenty dollars at a time have to do with anything? She had a charge account; he never refused her when she asked.

She couldn't go to sleep, berating Polly in her mind.

The heat of the Okanagan made summer seem more authentic than summer on the coast. The hills with their pale grass, the sparse shade of the drylands pine trees seemed a natural setting for so festive a wedding, with its endless supply of champagne, its dancing and flirtation and overflow of instant friendship and good will. Lorna got rapidly drunk and was amazed at how easy it was, with alcohol, to be loosed from the bondage of her spirits. Forlorn vapors lifted. She went to bed still drunk, and lecherous, to Brendan's benefit. Even her hangover the next day seemed mild, cleansing rather than punishing. Feeling frail but not at all displeased with herself, she lay by the shores of the lake and watched Brendan help Elizabeth build a sandcastle.

"Did you know that your daddy and I met at a wedding?" she said.

"Not much like this one, though," said Brendan. He meant that the other wedding, when a friend of his married the McQuaig girl (the McQuaigs being a top family in Lorna's home town), had been officially dry. The reception had been at the United Church Hall—Lorna was one of the girls recruited to pass sandwiches—and the drinking had been done in a hurry, in the parking lot. Lorna was not used to smelling whiskey on men and thought that Brendan must have put on too much of some unfamiliar hairdressing. Nevertheless she admired his thick shoulders, his bull neck, his laughing and commanding golden-brown eyes. When she learned that he was a teacher of mathematics she fell in love with what was inside his head, too. She was excited by whatever knowledge a man might have that was utterly strange to her. A knowledge of auto mechanics would have worked just as well.

His answering attraction to her seemed to be in the nature of a miracle. She learned later that he had been on the lookout for a wife: he was old enough, it was time. He wanted a young girl. Not a colleague, or a student, perhaps not even the sort of girl whose parents could send her to college. Unspoiled. Intelligent, but unspoiled. A wildflower, he said in the heat of those early days, and sometimes even now.

On the drive back they left this hot golden country behind, somewhere between Keremeos and Princeton. But the sun still shone, and Lorna had only a faint disturbance in her mind, like a hair in her vision that could be flicked away,

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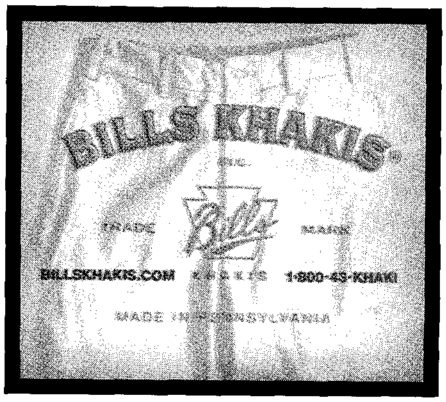

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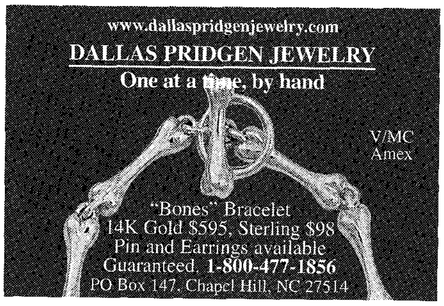

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or could float out of sight on its own.

But it kept coming back, it grew more ominous and persistent, till at last it made a spring at her and she knew it for what it was.

She was afraid—she was half certain—that while they were away Polly would have committed suicide in the kitchen of the house in North Vancouver.

In the kitchen. It was a definite picture Lorna had. She saw exactly the way in which Polly would have done it. She would have hanged herself just inside the back door. When they returned, when they came into the house from the garage, they would find the door locked. They would unlock it and try to push it open but be unable to because of the heavy lump of Polly's body against it. They would hurry around to the front door and come into the kitchen that way and be met by the full sight of Polly dead. She would be wearing the flounced denim skirt and the white drawstring blouse—the brave outfit in which she had first appeared to try their hospitality. Her long pale legs dangling down, her head twisted fatally on its delicate neck. In front of her body would be the kitchen chair she had climbed onto, and then stepped or jumped from, to see how misery could finish itself.

Alone in the house of people who did not want her, where the very walls and the windows and the cup she drank her coffee from must seem to despise her.

Lorna remembered a time when she had been left alone with Polly, left in Polly's charge for a day, in their grandmother's house. Perhaps her father was at the shop. But she had an idea that he, too, had gone away—all three adults were out of town. It must have been an unusual occasion, since they never went on shopping trips, let alone trips for pleasure. A funeral, almost certainly a funeral. The day was a Saturday, there was no school. Lorna was too young to be in school anyway. Her hair had not grown long enough to be put into pigtails. It blew in tender wisps around her head, as Polly's did now.

“Kid, we're up to *here* in bildungsromans.”

Polly was going through a stage then in which she loved to make candy, or rich treats of any kind, from her grandmother's cookbook. Chocolate date cake, macaroons, divinity fudge. She was in the middle of mixing something up that day, when she found that an ingredient she needed was not in the cupboard. She had to ride uptown on her bicycle to charge it at the store. The weather was windy and cold, the ground bare—the season must have been late fall or early spring. Before she left, Polly pushed in the damper on the woodstove. But she was fearful because of stories she had heard about children who perished in house fires when their mothers had run out on similar quick errands. So she directed Lorna to put on her coat and took her outside, around to the corner between the kitchen and the main part of the house, where the wind was not so strong. The house next door must have been locked, or she would have taken her there. She told her to stay put. Stay there, don't move, don't worry, she said. Then she kissed Lorna's ear and rode off to the store. Lorna obeyed her to the letter. For ten minutes, maybe fifteen, she remained crouched behind the white lilac bush, learning the shapes of the stones, the dark and light ones, in the house's foundation. Until Polly came tearing back and flung the bike down in the yard and came calling her name—“Lorna, Lorna”—throwing down the bag of brown sugar or walnuts and kissing her all over her head. For the thought had occurred to her that Lorna might have been spotted in her corner by lurking kidnappers—the bad men who were the reason that girls were not supposed to go down into the field behind the houses. She had prayed all the way back for this not to have happened. And it hadn't. She bustled Lorna inside to warm her bare knees and hands.

“Oh, the poor little handsies,” she said. “Oh, were you scared?” Lorna loved the fussing and bent her head to have it stroked, as if she were a pony.

The pines gave way to the denser evergreen forest, the brown lumps of hills to the rising blue-green mountains. Daniel began to whimper and Lorna got out his juice bottle. Later she asked Brendan to stop so that she could lay the baby down on the front seat and change his diaper. Brendan walked at a distance while she did this, smoking a cigarette. Diaper ceremonies always affronted him a little.

Lorna also took the opportunity to get out one of Elizabeth's storybooks, and when they were settled again she read to the children. It was a Dr. Seuss book. Elizabeth knew all the rhymes, and even Daniel had some idea of where to chime in with his made-up words.

Polly was no longer that person who had rubbed Lorna's small hands between her own, the person who knew all the things Lorna did not know, and who could be trusted to take care of her in the world. Everything had been turned around, and it seemed that in the years since Lorna got married Polly had stayed still. Lorna had passed her by. And now Lorna had the children in the back seat to take care of and to love, and it was unseemly for a person of Polly's age to come clawing for her share.

It was no use for Lorna to think this. No sooner had she put the argument in place than she felt the body knock against the door as they tried to push it open. The deadweight, the gray body. The body of Polly who had been given nothing at all. No part in the family she had come to join, and no hope of the change she must have dreamed was coming in her life.

"Now read 'Madeline,'" said Elizabeth.

"I don't think I brought 'Madeline,'" said Lorna. "No. I didn't bring it. Never mind, you know it by heart."

She and Elizabeth started off together:

In an old house in Paris that was covered
with vines
lived twelve little girls in two straight lines.
In two straight lines they broke their bread
and brushed their teeth and went to bed.

This is stupidity, this is melodrama, this is guilt. This will not have happened.

But such things do happen. Some people founder, they are not helped in time. They are not helped at all. Some people are pitched into darkness:

In the middle of one night
Miss Clavel turned on her light
and said, "Something is not right!"

"Mommy," said Elizabeth. "Why did you stop?"

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Lorna said, "I had to, for a minute. My mouth got dry."

At Hope, they had hamburgers and milkshakes. Then down the Fraser Valley, the children asleep in the back seat. Still some time left. Till they got to Chilliwack, till they got to Abbotsford, till they saw the hills of New Westminster ahead and the other hills crowned with houses, the beginnings of the city. Bridges still to go over, turns they had to take, streets they had to drive along, corners they had to pass. All this in the time before. The next time she saw any of it would be in the time after.

When they entered Stanley Park it occurred to her to pray. This was shameless—the opportune praying of a nonbeliever. The gibberish of let-it-not-happen, let-it-not-happen. Let it not have happened.

The day was still cloudless. From the Lions Gate Bridge they looked out at the open water.

"Can you see Vancouver Island today?" said Brendan. "You look—I can't."

Lorna craned her neck to look past him.

"Far away," she said. "Gabriola. Then Vancouver Island. Quite faint, but it's there."

And with the sight of those blue, progressively dimmer, finally almost dissolving mounds that seemed to float upon the sea she thought of one thing there was left to do. Make a bargain. Believe that it was still possible, up to the last minute it was possible to make a bargain.

It had to be serious, a most final and wrenching promise or offer. Take this. I promise this. If it can be made not true, if it can not have happened.

Not the children. She snatched that thought away as if she were grabbing them out of a fire. Not Brendan, for an opposite reason. She did not love him enough. She would say she loved him, and mean it to a certain extent, and she wanted to be loved by him, but there was a little hum of hate running along beside her love, nearly all the time. So it would be reprehensible—also useless—to offer him in any bargain.

Herself? Her looks? Her health?

It occurred to her that she might be on the wrong track. In a case like this, it might not be up to you to choose. Not up to you to set the terms. You would know them when you met them. You must promise to honor them without knowing what they were going to be. Promise.

But nothing to do with the children.

Up Capilano Road, into their own part of the city and their own corner of the world, where their lives took on true weight and their actions took on consequences. There were the uncompromising wooden walls of their house showing through the trees.

"The front door would be easier," Lorna said. "Then we wouldn't have any steps."

But Brendan went the usual way, saying, "What's the problem with a couple of steps?"

"I never got to see the bridge," Elizabeth cried, suddenly wide awake and disappointed. "Why didn't you wake me up to see the bridge?"

Nobody answered her.

"Daniel's arm is all sunburnt," she said, in a tone of incomplete satisfaction.

Lorna heard voices that she thought were coming from the yard of the house next door. She followed Brendan around the corner of the house. Daniel lay against her shoulder, still heavy with sleep. She carried the diaper bag and the storybook bag, and Brendan carried the suitcase.

The people whose voices she had heard were in her own back yard. Polly and Lionel. They had dragged two lawn chairs around so that they could sit in the shade. They had their backs to the view.

Lionel. She had forgotten all about him.

He jumped up and ran to open the back door.

"The expedition has returned with all members accounted for," he said, in a voice that Lorna did not believe she had ever heard before. An unforced heartiness in it, an easy and appropriate confidence. The voice of the friend of the family. As he held the door open he looked straight into her face—something he had almost never done—and gave her a smile from which all subtlety, secrecy, ironic complicity, and mysterious devotion had been removed. All complications, all private messages had been removed.

She made her voice an echo of his.

"So—when did you get back?"

"Saturday," he said. "I'd forgotten you were going away. I came laboring up here to say hello and you weren't here, but Polly was here, and of course she told me and then I remembered."

"Polly told you what?" said Polly, coming up behind him. This was not really a question, but the half-teasing remark of a woman who knows that almost anything she says will be well re-

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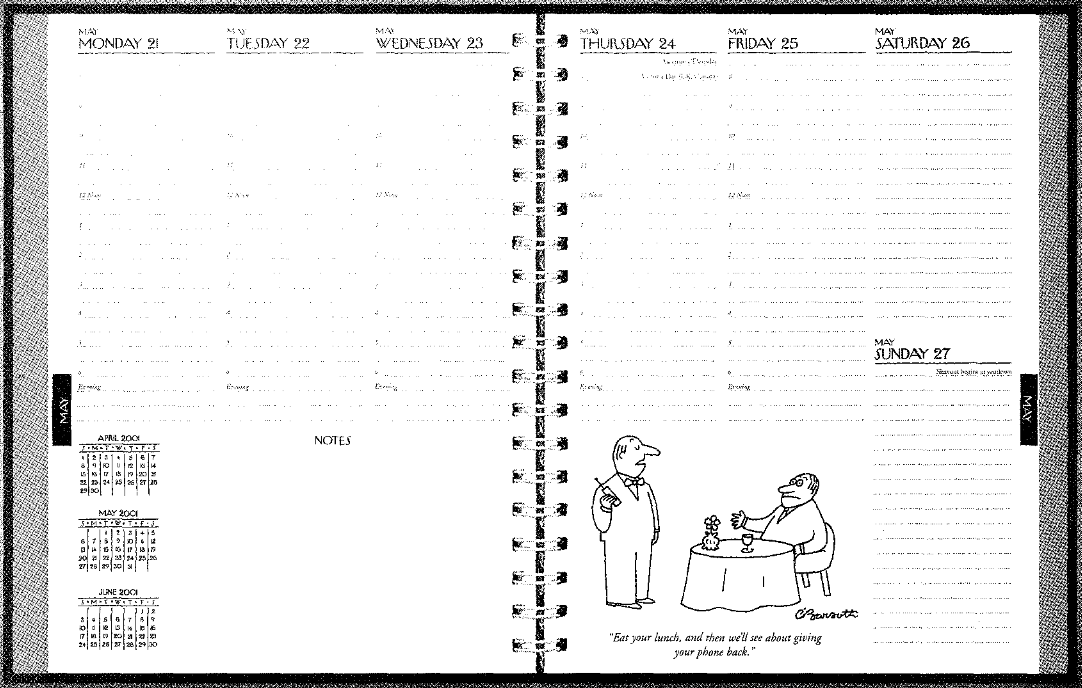
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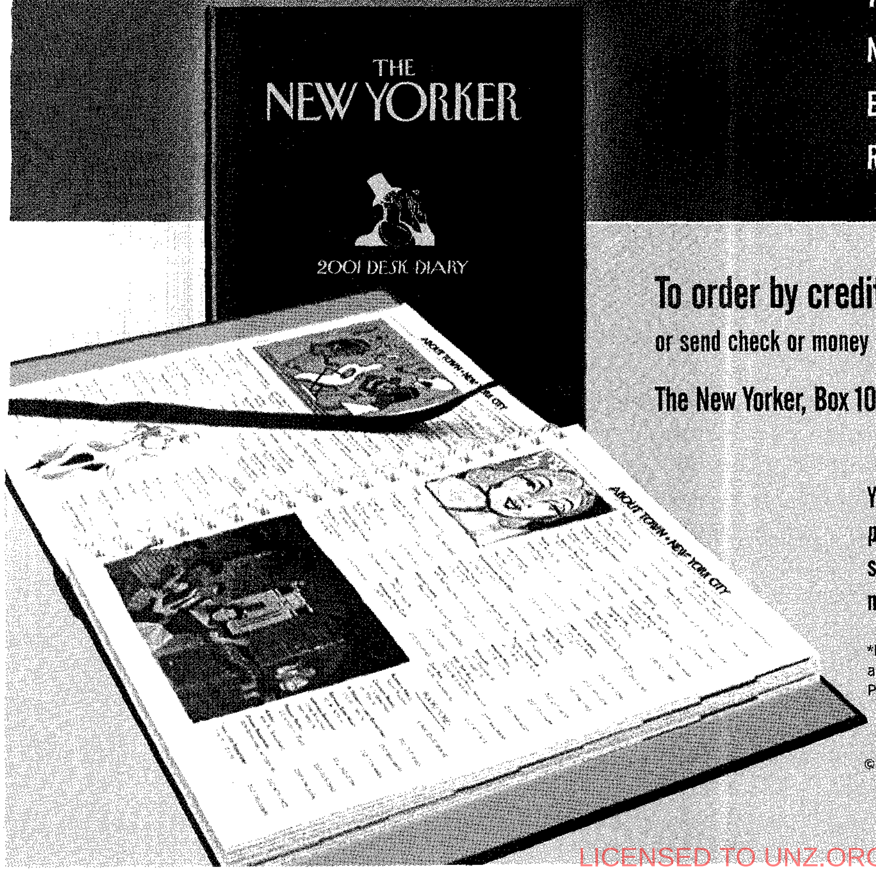
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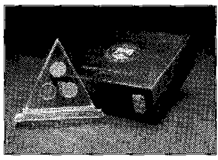

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ceived. Polly's sunburn had turned to tan, or at least to a new flush, on her forehead and neck.

"Here," she said to Lorna, relieving her of both of the bags carried over her arm and the empty juice bottle in her hand. "I'll take everything but the baby."

Lionel's floppy hair was now more brownish-black than black—of course, she was seeing him for the first time in full sunlight—and his skin, too, was tanned, enough for his forehead to have lost its pale gleam. He wore the usual dark pants, but his shirt was unfamiliar to her. A yellow short-sleeved shirt of some much ironed, shiny, cheap material, too big across the shoulders, maybe bought at the church thrift sale.

Lorna carried Daniel upstairs. She laid him in his crib and stood beside him, making soft noises and stroking his back.

She thought that Lionel must be punishing her for her mistake in going to his room. The landlady would have told him. Lorna should have expected that, if she had stopped to think. She hadn't stopped to think, probably because she had the idea that it would not matter. She might even have thought that she would tell him herself.

I was going past on my way to the playground and I just thought I would go in and sit in the middle of your floor. I can't explain it. It seemed like that would give me a moment's pure peace, to be in your room and sit in the middle of the floor.

She had thought—after the letter?—that there was a bond between them, not to be made explicit but to be relied on. And she had been wrong, she had scared him. Presumed too much. He had turned around and there was Polly. Because of Lorna's offense, he had taken up with Polly.

Perhaps not, though. Perhaps he had simply changed. She thought of the extraordinary bareness of his room, the light on its walls. Out of that might come such altered versions of himself, created with no effort, in the blink of an eye. In response to something that had gone a little wrong, or to a realization that he could not carry something through. Or to nothing that definite—just the blink of an eye.

When Daniel had fallen into true sleep she went downstairs. In the bathroom she found that Polly had rinsed the diapers properly and put them in the pail, covered with the blue solution that would disinfect them. She picked up the suitcase that was sitting in the middle of the kitchen floor, carried it upstairs, and laid it on the big bed, opening it to sort out which clothes had to be washed and which could be put away.

The window of this room looked out on the back yard. She heard voices—Elizabeth's raised, almost shrieking with the excitement of homecoming and perhaps the effort of keeping the attention of an enlarged audience, Brendan's authoritative but pleasant, giving an account of their trip.

She went to the window and looked down. She saw Brendan go over to the storage shed, unlock it, and start to drag out the children's wading pool. The door was swinging shut on him, and Polly hurried to hold it open.

Lionel got up and went to uncoil the hose. She would not have thought he even knew where the hose was.

Brendan said something to Polly. Thanking her? You would think they were on the best of terms.

How had that happened?

It could be that Polly was now fit to be taken account of, being Lionel's choice. Lionel's choice and not Lorna's imposition.

Or Brendan might simply be happier because they had been away. He might have dropped for a while the burden of keeping his household in order. He might have seen, quite rightly, that this altered Polly was no threat.

A scene so ordinary and amazing, come about as if by magic. Everybody happy.

Brendan had begun to blow up the rim of the plastic pool. Elizabeth had stripped to her underpants and was dancing around impatiently. Brendan hadn't bothered this time to tell her to run and put on her bathing suit because underpants were not suitable. Lionel had turned the water on, and until it was needed for the pool he stood watering the nasturtiums, like any householder. Polly spoke to Brendan and he pinched shut the hole he had been blowing into and passed the half-inflated heap of plastic over to her.

Lorna recalled that at the beach Polly

had been the one to blow up the dolphin. As she said herself, she had good wind. She blew steadily and with no apparent effort. She stood there in her shorts, her bare legs firmly apart, skin gleaming like birch bark. And Lionel watched her. Exactly what I need, he might be thinking. Such a competent and sensible woman, pliant but solid. Someone not vain or dreamy or dissatisfied. That might well be the sort of person he would marry someday. A wife who could take over. Then he would change and change again, maybe fall in love with some other woman, in his way, but the wife would be too busy to take notice.

That might happen. Polly and Lionel. Or it might not. Polly might go home as planned, and if she did there wouldn't be any heartbreak. Or that was what Lorna thought. Polly would marry or not marry, but, whichever way it was, the things that happened with men would not be what broke her heart.

In a short time the rim of the wading pool was swollen and smooth. The pool was set on the grass, the hose placed inside it, and Elizabeth was splashing her feet in the water. She looked up at Lorna as if she had known she was there all the time.

"It's cold," she cried in a rapture. "Mommy—it's cold."

Now Brendan looked up at Lorna, too. "What are you doing up there?"

"Unpacking."

"You don't have to do that now. Come on outside."

"I will. In a minute."

Since she had entered the house—in fact, since she had first understood that the voices she heard came from her own back yard and belonged to Polly and Lionel—Lorna had not thought of the vision she'd had, mile after mile, of Polly lashed to the back door. She was surprised by it now as you sometimes are surprised, long after waking, by the recollection of a dream. It had a dream's potency and shamefulness. A dream's uselessness as well.

Not quite at the same time but in a lagging way came the memory of her bargain. Her weak and primitive, neurotic notion of a bargain.

But what was it she had promised?

Nothing to do with the children—she remembered that.

Something to do with herself?

She had promised that she would do whatever she had to do when she recognized what that was.

That was hedging, that was a bargain that was not a bargain, a promise that had no meaning at all.

But she tried out various possibilities. Almost as if she were shaping this story to be told to somebody—not Lionel now, but somebody—as an entertainment.

Give up reading books. Take in foster children from bad homes and poor countries. Labor to cure them of wounds and neglect.

Go to church. Agree to believe in God.

Cut her hair short, stop putting on makeup, never again haul her breasts up into a wired brassiere.

She sat down on the bed, tired out by all this sport, this irrelevance.

What made more sense was that the bargain she was bound to was to go on living as she had been doing. The bargain was already in force. To accept what had happened and be clear about what would happen. Days and years and feelings much the same, except that the children would grow up, and there might be one or two more of them, and they, too, would grow up, and she and Brendan would grow older and then old.

It was not until now, not until this moment, that she saw so clearly that she had been counting on something happening, something that would change her life. She had accepted her marriage as one big change but not as the last one.

So nothing now but what she or anybody could sensibly foresee. That was to be her happiness, that was what she had bargained for. Nothing secret, or strange.

Pay attention to this, she thought. This is serious. She felt like getting down on her knees. Elizabeth called again, "Mommy! Come here." And then the others—Brendan and Polly and Lionel, one after the other—were calling her, teasing her.

"Mommy!"

"Mommy!"

"Come here."

It was a long time ago that this happened. In North Vancouver, when they lived in the post-and-beam house. When she was twenty-four years old and new to bargaining. ◆

Goose down robe

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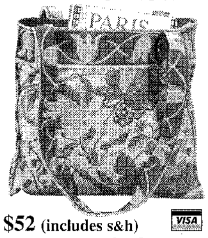

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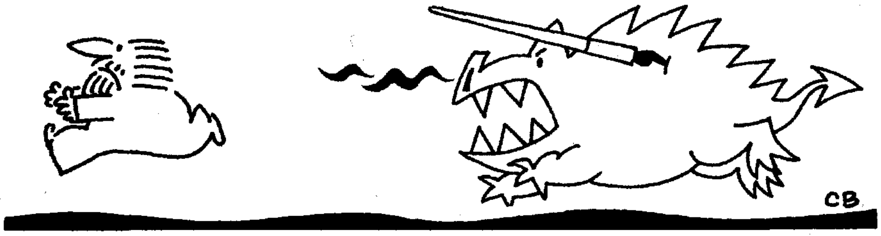

CHARLES BURNS

ON TELEVISION

DOPEY AND GRUMPY

"Ed" and "Curb Your Enthusiasm": comedy bland and black.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

The map of the United States is always good for a smile, as anyone with a souvenir coffee mug from Intercourse, Pennsylvania, or Frostproof, Florida, can tell you. But I don't know how I'm supposed to react to the name of the town in which the new NBC series "Ed" takes place: Stuckeyville. Stuckeyville, Ohio. What comes to mind? Well, Doctor, I think of the word "stuck," obviously, and then there's the roadside eatery Stuckey's, and for some reason I think of the commercial that says, "With a name like Smucker's, it has to be good," but basically I can't tell whether the name is meant to be amusing in and of itself, or whether the show's creators are making a joke at the expense of the Midwest or chummily throwing an arm around the Midwest's shoulder, or what. I know it must mean *something*, because "Ed" was brought to life by people who know how to put out a smart, funny, carefully constructed yet casual-seeming show not one but five nights a week: Rob Burnett, an executive producer of "Late Show with David Letterman," and Jon Beckerman, a former "Late Show" head writer. (Letterman himself is one of "Ed" 's executive producers.) Or maybe it doesn't mean anything—maybe Burnett and Beckerman, like Letterman, whose production company is called Worldwide Pants, just like the way certain words sound as they trip off the tongue. The reason for all this confusion and overthinking is that I can't square the comic chops and the evident intelligence of the people responsible for "Ed" with the dumbness of "Ed" itself: Is the show acting dumb on purpose (as the Hoosier host of "Late Show" often does), or is it just plain dumb?

At the beginning of the first episode, Ed Stevens (Tom Cavanagh), a New York City lawyer, gets fired for misplacing a comma in a five-hundred-page contract—an error that costs his firm $1.6 million—and comes home from the office to find his wife in bed with the mailman. (What a nice mailman, willing to go above lobby level.) At loose ends, he flees to his home town, the aforementioned Stuckeyville, where two momentous things happen: he runs into Carol (Julie Bowen), a woman he had a crush on back at Stuckeyville High, who is now a teacher there herself, and she gives him a life-changing kiss that inspires him to buy the local bowling alley and move back to Stuckeyville for good. High school, and the past in general, looms large in "Ed"; the show is a fantasia on recapturing the lost years and the kind of small-town life that Burnett had when he was growing up in suburban New Jersey. (Many of the show's locations are within a few miles of Burnett's old stomping grounds.) In one episode, Eddie Bracken plays Stuckeyville Stan, a magician who performed at Ed's childhood birthday parties and comes to him now for legal help—Ed has opened a practice in the bowling alley—in preventing a younger performer from revealing Stan's trade secrets. Stuckeyville Stan's slogan is "Welcome to the Wonderful World of Possibility," and I think that is also how "Ed" 's creators envision the show's message. But what "Ed" really represents is the world of inevitability. Over the opening credits, you see Ed cruising into town past the stereotypical indicators of the non-urban idyll: a road sign saying "Welcome to Stuckeyville" (founded 1893), a luncheonette with a sign in the window that says "$6.00 All the Pie You Can Eat," a baseball field, the bowling alley (named, of course, Stuckeybowl), and a white New Englandy church (which, at least, is not called Stuckeychurch). It's all very Norman Rockwell, with the difference that there is more emotional range and resonance in Rockwell's illustrations—or in, say, "The Andy Griffith Show," or "Northern Exposure," whose Cicely, Alaska, was a rough counterpart to Stuckeyville—than can be found in "Ed."

The people we come into contact with in this little town that time forgot are all supposed to be, more or less, lovable—especially Ed. But to love Ed you have to have a strong conviction that whimsicality for its own sake is a many-splendored thing. He's a tall, skinny goofball with a perpetual Alfred E. Neuman grin, and his line of winsomeness is to have named three freckles on his wife's face Larry, Moe, and Curly, and to walk into Carol's classroom wearing a suit of armor and carrying a bouquet. When Carol takes the errant knight outside for a little talking-to, he says, "But look what I've done here today. I'm adorable." In a later episode, after Carol has broken up with her long-term boyfriend, Ed stands outside her house at night throwing hundreds of waffles (don't ask) at her bedroom window; she wearily says to him, "I don't think I can take you being adorable right now," and he counters with "I'm sorry, I can't turn that off." Apparently not. (Cavanagh has appeared on "Providence" as a guy who thinks he's a dog, and he brings a kind of canine quality to the role of Ed: a relentless, demanding friendliness.) And some of the other characters are just as trying, particularly the three bowling-alley employees, whose quirks runneth over and whose scenes I have come to dread. Ed is living with his old friends Mike and Nancy, a married couple (who, ickily, have known each other since they were twelve) with a four-month-old baby. In what seems to have become a ghastly running joke in

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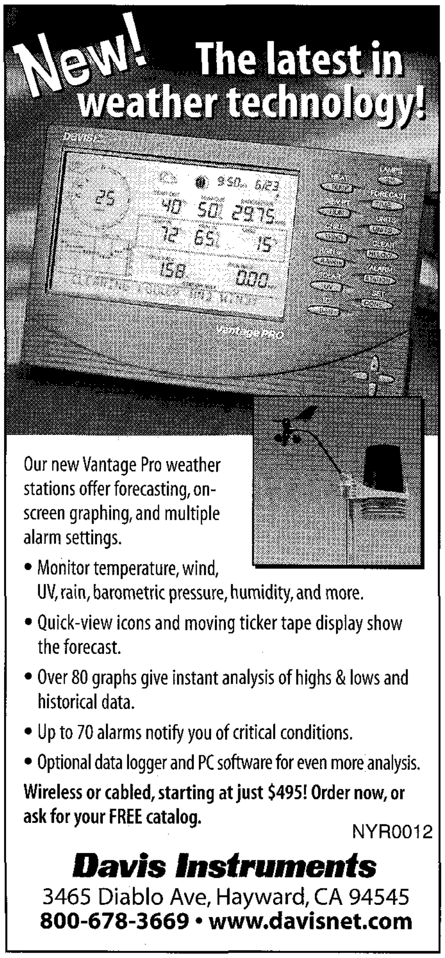

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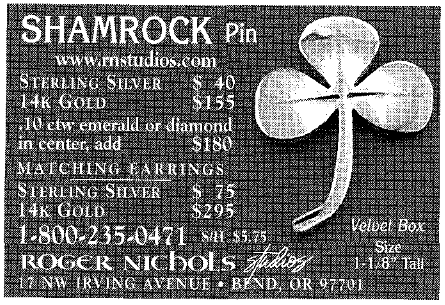

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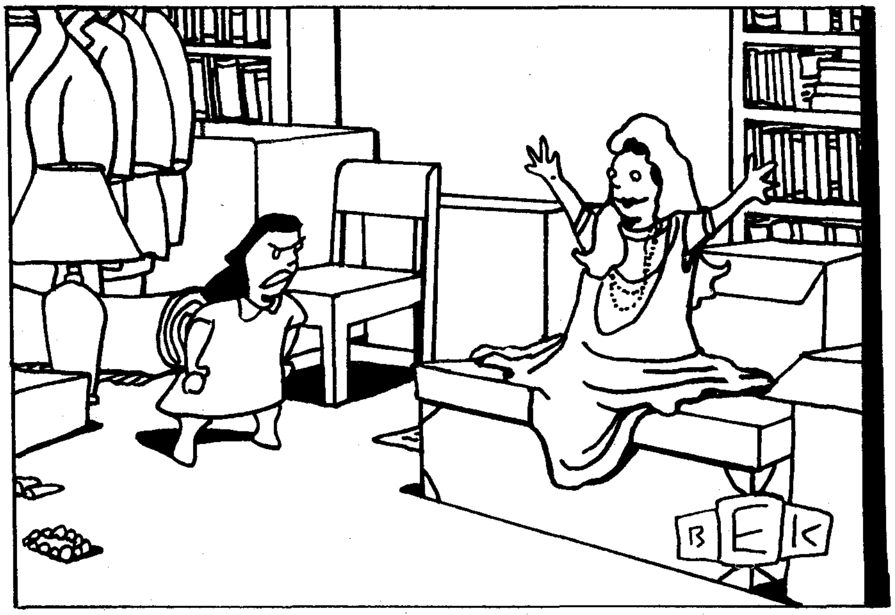
the show, Mike (Josh Randall) likes to make cracks about how Nancy (Jana Marie Hupp) hasn't wanted to have sex since the baby was born: "At some point, the store's got to re-open for business or you lose customers." (We discover, eventually, that Mike's the one with the problem: now that his wife is a mommy, she doesn't turn him on.) The scripts also call for Mike—a doctor—to be stupider than necessary in other ways. He tells Ed that it's better for a boss to be feared than loved, and then attributes the adage not to Machiavelli but to Prince Matchabelli—the perfume company. A couple of the show's actors are winning, though: Bowen's Carol is pleasantly low key and thoughtful; Lesley Boone is sweet in the thankless role of overweight best friend; and Hupp has some good scenes as an insecure new mother, who fires her babysitter for being too good.

"Ed" the show had the potential to be appealing in the way that the "Andy Hardy" movies were, even to people who knew that Mickey Rooney's Carvel was merely an M-G-M fiction. But Ed the character does not earn your heart, because that's all he ever tries to do; he's a catalogue of cute comic bits and tics whose sole function is to win you over. His boyishness isn't even high-school level; it's oddly presexual and inert. It would have been hard not to have high hopes for "Ed," given Burnett and Beckerman's combined twenty-three years with Letterman. But we don't expect the jokes on Letterman to add up to anything; they come, often brilliantly, and they go. That cool sensibility doesn't help if you're trying to create characters we can care about. When Dave's dumb, we relish it, but when "Ed" 's dumb, we feel as if we were being served all the baloney we can eat.

The character that the comedy writer and "Seinfeld" co-creator Larry David plays in his new HBO series, "Curb Your Enthusiasm"—himself—is a psychic accident intent on happening, a speck of grit looking for an eye to lodge in. No good deed that he performs for another human being goes unpunished, and neither do any of his more numerous bad deeds. If David wrote the show's scripts, he could be considered the Bard of Bad Karma. But there are no scripts, and he functions instead as a cloud seeder creating black-comedy downpours; he writes the story outlines for the show, then he and his cast, which includes Cheryl Hines as his wife and Jeff Garlin as his manager, improvise the whole half hour of this uncomfortable, almost unbelievably funny show. Each episode centers on the myriad ways in which Larry manages to fill his days with miseries of misunderstanding and bouts of inexcusable behavior, and, while he doesn't always deserve all the blame at the beginning of his awful encounters—with his lawyer, his manager, his friends, his fellow-comedians (Richard Lewis has been



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particularly good as a friend/combatant of Larry's), his doctor, the doctor's receptionist, a restaurant captain, a parking-lot attendant (make that *two* parking-lot attendants)—he nearly always qualifies for most of it by the end. But if the character of Larry David (who the real David says is not an exact replica of him) is hypersensitive, he is not reflexively unreasonable or disagreeable, so there's some unpredictability to his ranting and raving, and it's fun to see which moments tip him over the edge into farcical volcanic rage: how high will the lava spurt this time, and how much damage will it do?

"Curb Your Enthusiasm," which grew out of an HBO comedy special of the same name that David did last year, got off to a languid start. The first episode opens with David sitting on his couch poking the bell-curve bulge made by the bunched-up fabric in the crotch of his pants, and although his pants do get him into some trouble, there isn't much to the show, except for a great moment in a movie theatre when a woman in an aisle seat barely budges when he asks to be let through and their tempers escalate in a way that is no less gripping for being all too familiar—and it's gripping partly because you never see this kind of moment on TV, except with a laugh track and a relatively neat conclusion. But closure is not in the cards for David; things hang queasily in the air at the end of each show, the way they do in life a lot of the time. In one episode, while he's on the driving range at his club, David decides not to pick up a golf ball that rolls toward him because the man who dropped it is wearing a hat that is held on by a string around his neck. It was the string that offended him, David tells his wife later: "I see certain items, and I recoil in horror." In subsequent episodes, moments like that and the movie-theatre unpleasantness—moments made up mostly of nothing, which grow to monstrous proportions and invariably come back and bite him in the rear—are increasingly more frequent and more tightly woven together, and sometimes the tangle of predicaments becomes so impressively dense you can no longer see any reality other than that of Larry's world. David surely doesn't know, or care, how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, but he has quite a gift for finding every last fly in the ointment. ♦

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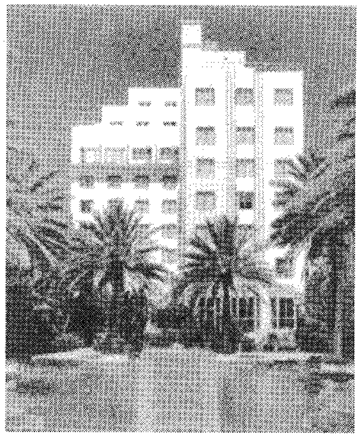

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A CRITIC AT LARGE

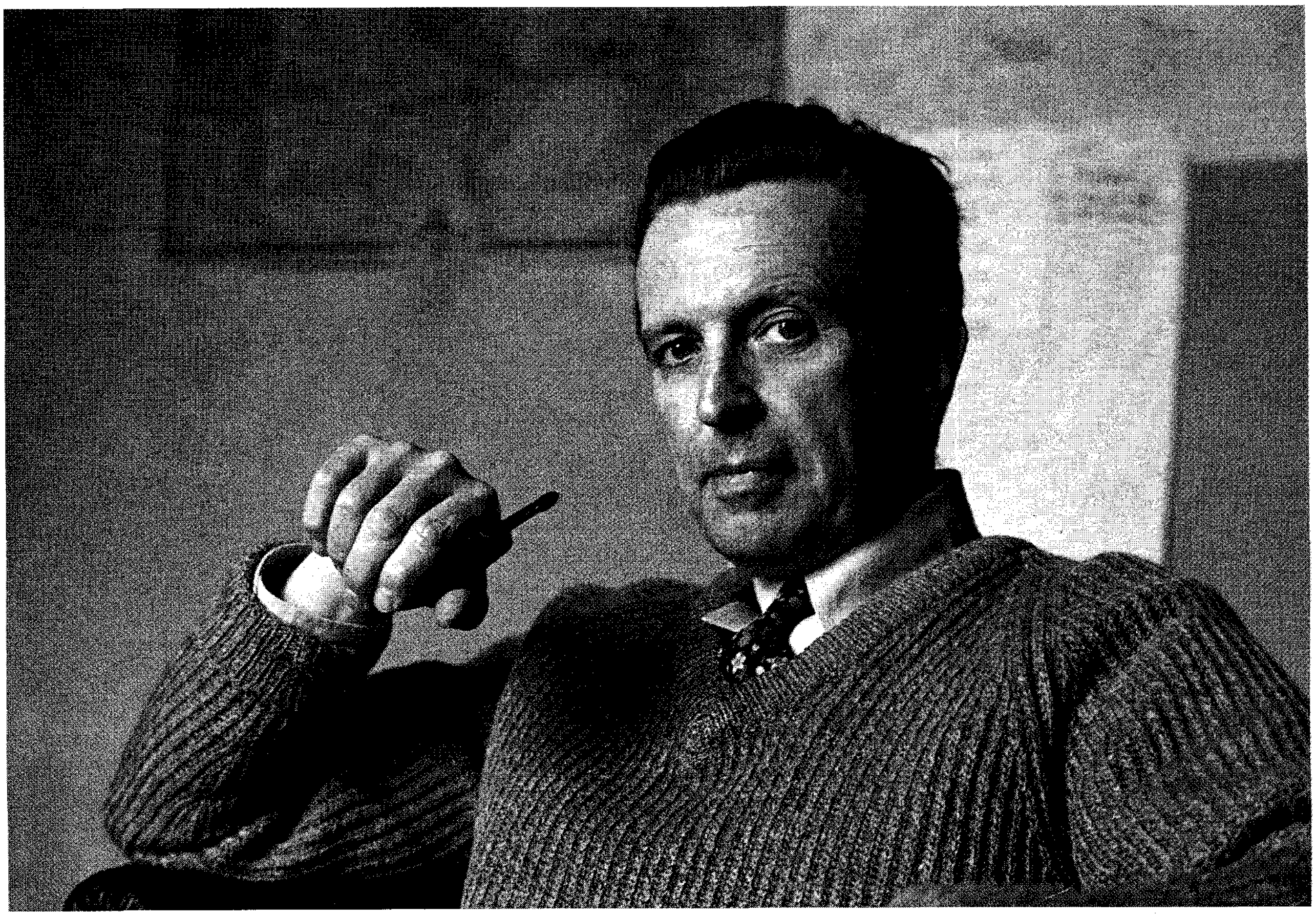
CHURCH MICE

The forlorn priests of a neglected American realist.

BY JAMES WOOD

Does anyone, really, like priests? Anticlericalism seems a healthy human instinct, our peasantry of spirit asserting itself. I grew up among priests; they were stationed throughout my family, as uncles and cousins. A certain kind of Church of England rectory became as familiar to me as my bedroom: the heavy wood and meagre ornaments of the main rooms, faintly warmed either by the woolly heat of an electric fire or by the unpleasant residue of the last supplicants to occupy them—those needy parishioners with apparently nothing else to do. Sometimes, as a cheap stay against the cold, plastic sheeting had been pinned to the windows, so that the garden beyond seemed submarine. One dreaded having to use the bathroom, down the frigid corridors, invariably to be faced by green medicinal soap attached by an ingrown magnet to its stingy holder. And then there were the priests: the pedants or the saints, the zealots or the retirees, the trendy or the tired. Their long cassocks appeared to be hiding things. To a child it seemed, impossibly, that these men, dressed from neck to feet in black, the tough vestments always a little shiny, were clothed entirely in shoe leather. They hung their heads with loud modesty. One of them had a fondness for the verb "titivate"; another introduced each of his self-pleasing observations with a pompous "apropos of nothing."

This is also the world, although in a Catholic version, of J. F. Powers, a novelist who wrote supremely well about the Catholic Church in the Midwest between the late nineteen-forties and the late nineteen-eighties. Powers, who was born in Jacksonville, Illinois, in 1917, and who died in 1999, is now barely visible at the end of that stretched telescope "the writer's writer." He wrote sparely and sparingly, and produced only two novels—one of which, "Morte D'Urban," won the National Book Award in 1963—and three collections of short stories, which were praised by Evelyn Waugh, Flannery O'Connor, and Philip Roth. He disappeared into a rather cloudy posterity while still alive; that is to say, he lived to see his works go out of print. Actual posterity, in the form of reprints of all his writing ("Morte D'Urban," $12.95; "Wheat That Springeth Green," $12.95; "The Stories of J. F. Powers," $14.95) by New York Review Books, has been kinder, though it seems sadly likely that the combination of Powers's refined style, ironic pessimism, and chosen subject—



J. F. Powers himself was a true priest of his craft: devout, retiring, and unworldly. A single phrase could consume days of effort.

priests and more priests—will eventually deal his work a second death.

While Powers has inevitably been claimed by fellow-communicants as a "Catholic writer," his world is the opposite of an advertisement for the Church. His priestly heroes are not glamorously errant, like the priests of Greene and Mauriac, whose sins make them interesting, and possibly better shepherds. They are petty disappointments, too conventional to be truly religious. What piety and spiritual alertness they had has long softened amid the gluey fixtures and routines of daily parish life. Freed of their old seminary ideals, they have become courtiers of compromise.

Greene is enjoyed by Catholics, in part, one suspects, because his pessimism is not threatening. He tells us, in effect, that the religious life is more complicated than we imagined, and this ultimately consoles us. But Powers is threatening, and ought not to be easily enjoyed by Catholics, because his work suggests that the religious life, at least for priests, has become practically unattainable. Hardly ever, in more than a thousand pages of fiction, do we see one of Powers's priests reflect spiritually on a spiritual matter. The reason for this is not simply that, on the principle of the Koran's rarely mentioning camels, these men do not speak of what surrounds them. It is that they are slaves to what Kierkegaard attacked as "Christendom"—the business of priestly activity rather than the practice of Christian witness, love of the world rather than imitation of Christ.

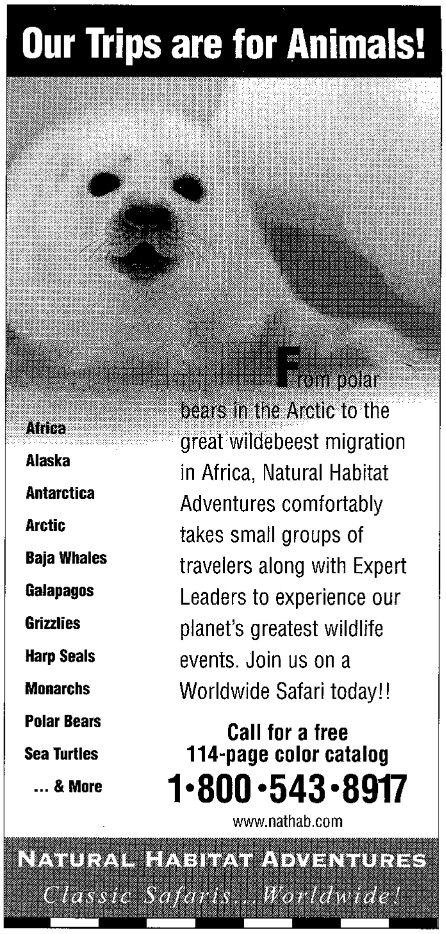
Powers was himself a true priest of his craft: devout, retiring, and unworldly. He was a conscientious objector in the Second World War, and served thirteen months in prison. His writing, he felt, was God-given. "I am in the alphabet God uses when I do my best work. . . . I think God has given me talent," he said in 1988. "I have thanked God for it, usually every day in my prayers." A delicate stylist, he husbanded that talent: the nice hazard of a single phrase, or even a word, could consume days of effort. In an excellent introduction to the collected stories, Denis Donoghue says that the Irish short-story writer Sean O'Faolain would joke about how Powers "spent the morning putting in a comma and the afternoon wondering whether or not he should replace it with a semicolon." It is a firm, rich, American prose, at once a literary style and a way of talking, in which the dominant tone, belying the effort that went into its making, is a kind of heightened relaxedness. A characteristic passage, from the story "The Presence of Grace," has a priest sitting unwillingly with some drowsy parishioners after lunch:

> There was a lull during which Velma loaded her cigarette case and Father Fabre surveyed the room—the bookcase with no books in it, only plants and bric-a-brac, and the overstuffed furniture rising like bread beneath the slipcovers, which rivaled nature in the tropics for color and variety of growing things, and the upright piano with the mandolin and two photographs on top: one would be the late Mr Mathers and somewhere in the other, a group picture of graduating nurses, would be the girl he had married, now stout, being now what she had always been becoming. Mrs Mathers was openly napping now. The room was filled with breathing, hers and Mr Pint's in unison, and the sun fell upon them all and upon the trembling ferns.

For many years, Powers taught at St. John's University, a Benedictine institution in Collegeville, Minnesota, where he took part in the religious observances. He has that devotion to the Church which is often expressed in a kind of smothered anger, in disgust at its failures. Because he is a comic writer, this anger is bandaged in smiles, and sometimes difficult to make out. But his work really offers a hard critique of the Church in its useless postwar prime.

Heine, in his history of religion and philosophy in Germany, writes that Martin Luther failed to see that the idea of Christianity, in its "annihilation of sensuality," demands the impossible of human nature. But the Catholic Church, Heine says, did acknowledge this and, appropriately, worked out a contract between God and the Devil, spirit and matter. Powers's priests are such contractualists. These are not men who would bother to throw an inkpot at the Devil; they might hand him a pen and point to the dotted line. In one story, "Zeal," a bishop tires of listening to a priest who has been idealistically telling parishioners that they should not tip waiters, since the activity infringes the dignity of those who serve. The

COURTESY HUGH POWERS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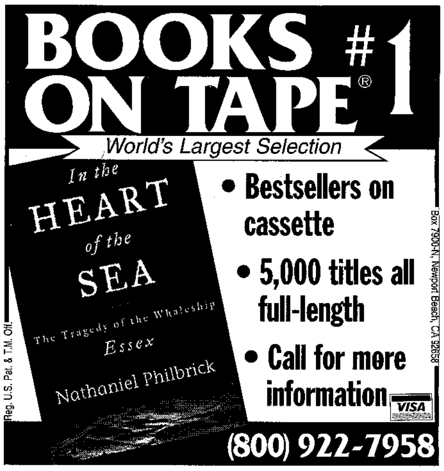
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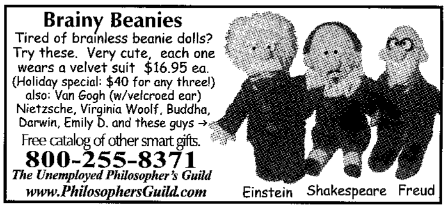
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"No, leave it long in the back so I can look like a nincompoop."

bishop reflects that "people should do what they could do, little though it might be, and shouldn't be asked to attempt what was obviously beyond them."

Father Urban, the hero of "Morte D'Urban," and Powers's most engaging character, is a roving ambassador of Minnesota's churches, who wants "simply to pump a little life into the parish, without being pretentious about it." He busies himself in addressing the Great Plains Commercial Club, drives around in a borrowed sports car, and builds a golf course at his order's retreat house. Vain, ambitious, slippery, he is greased in secularism, and slyly avoids theological controversy—"he could meet somebody on the other side tomorrow." In Powers's second novel, "Wheat That Springeth Green" (1988), Father Joe Hackett—he is indeed a hack—begins his seminary life determined to be saintly, but quickly squanders the impulse in parish life: "The truth was *he* hadn't sacrificed his spiritual life—it had been done for him, by his appointment to Holy Faith."

These priests tend to shrink from the more pious worshippers. Father Burner, in "Prince of Darkness," "liked his parishioners to be retiring, dumb, or frightened." Some of the funniest scenes in this very funny body of work involve priests fleeing from, or more subtly evading, their most passionate solicitors: "A backslider he could handle, it was the old story, but a red-hot believer, especially a talkative one, could be a devilish nuisance. This kind might be driven away only by prayer and fasting, and he was not adept at either." Often the descriptions are cynical. Of the bishop in "Morte D'Urban" Powers writes, "Great Plains, after all, was a rural diocese, and so the Bishop made a point of being for everything rural—hence the public prayers all summer long for whatever it was he was told that the farmers wanted in the way of weather."

Powers's priests are spiritually incurious, even philistine—Father Burner thinks "Studs Lonigan" "the best thing since the Bible"—and their daily bread is merely the spoiled grain of bureaucratic trivialities: whether they will get free railway passes, the guttering and the heating, the fund-raising for new buildings, the Men's Club, the Altar and Rosary Society, whether attendance percentages are up or down. These are men who, against Jesus' exhortation in the Gospels, give all their thought to the morrow. They are congested with ambition—but only the ambition to go from curate to pastor, from "mouse to rat, as the saying went." An archdeacon is seen reading *Forbes*. A former bishop is praised because "he did know real estate." The Church is a corporation, "second only to Standard Oil" in its efficiency, and is to be managed as such.

In this jiggly satirical mode, Powers can sound, for better or worse, like Sinclair Lewis. At times, perhaps, as more regularly in Lewis, the ironies are too broad: Father Burner thinks, "Yes, if he had to, he would die for the Faith," while driving to a hamburger joint. (The moral stutter of that "if he had to" is, however, finely judged.) But Powers suggests a deeper criticism of the Church. For all the obvious worldliness of his priests, there is something rather unworldly about them. Indeed, one might say that they have been corrupted by their unworldliness. The parochialism and claustrophobia of their minds and conversation, despite the sour prosperity of their businesslike approach, has a naïveté, a complacency, a closedness. It is shoptalking with nothing to sell.

Powers captures this closedness with fine artistry; if he did not, his fiction would have only sociological value. Here are the rectories, womenless but for their bitter housekeepers, their awful food ("hashed brown potatoes, scorched green beans, ground meat of some kind . . . sliced canned peaches and cardboard Fig Newtons"), their wordlessly loyal janitors, their mean, self-absorbed, dry pastors and the fresh curates sent to assist them, still idealistic and pious from the seminary but suddenly standing on the precipice of utility. His writing has a Chekhovian precision, whereby each detail is not static—not jelled in its own little pride of chosenness—but dynamic, mobile, a wheel of story. Reading Powers, one is often reminded of Chekhov's "The Bishop," in which is briefly told the anecdote of a short priest and his enormously tall son, a theological student, who one day lost his temper with the cook and called her "thou ass of Jehudiel," which caused the student's father to go very quiet—"ashamed that he could remember no such ass in the Bible." Chekhov stole from Ivan Bunin the real anecdote of a deacon who ate all the caviar at a funeral, and made it the opening of his story "In the Ravine."

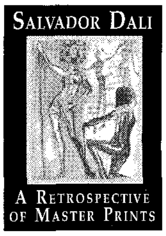
Powers's details are like that: exploding anecdotes. Joe Hackett, in "Wheat That Springeth Green," tips a little extra in a restaurant, "in case the waitress was a Catholic, or a non-Catholic." But parsimony is more common. In "The Presence of Grace," we make the acquaintance of a memorably mean pastor, "a graying dormouse," who speaks to his curate only in savagely arrested phrases. Presumably to save money, at the end of the last Mass he blows out all the prayer candles lit by parishioners. " 'Fire hazard,' he'd said, caught in the act." In "One of Them," an equally stingy priest is said to have kept the Christmas ham in the trunk of his car, bringing it out only for meals. Another unpleasant prelate, in "The Forks," delivers an arid little lecture on the history and significance of handshaking rather than shake the hand of his new curate, and is seen, with devastating irony, entering a doorway thus: "He held the screen open momentarily, as if remembering something or reluctant to enter before himself—such was his humility."

These rectories are chambers of denial, and we see how priests, trapped inside them, might overcompensate with a cynicism of permissible worldliness. But it is a faux worldliness, limited in danger; the real worldliness is the carnality that cannot be. A slick, businesslike manliness, a virility about attendance percentages and fund-raising, a gluttony in food and drink and tobacco, an antisocial selfishness, a stupefied obeisance to television sports—Powers's characters submit to these allowed lapses, as flights from the unreality of their domestic habitats, and as escapes into a merely sanctioned secularism. They are shallow sinners, as they are shallow believers.

The carnality that cannot be is sex, of course, not just the desire or the act but the realm of normality to which sex is the introduction: family life, uninsured relations with other women (Powers's priests keep their study doors open when females are visiting), a life with one's body which is inevitable rather than forced. Sex is at the heart of sin because it is the central desire; and if, as Kierkegaard said, sin is at the heart of Christianity, then sex must be, too. And sex is also limitless, because it is the most natural desire. Alcohol, gluttony, cynicism—these are controllable sins, even if only notionally, because they are not universal. The priest can have these moral hernias, but he cannot allow the enormous collapse into sexual desire. Jesus wished us to police the mind itself. Thus, strangely, the Church praised by Heine for its compromise between spirit and matter in fact demands the impossible of its priests, demands an "annihilation of sensuality."

One has to infer some of this from Powers's work. His priests are curiously hulled—bereft of sexual desire, so that all their small sins and failures seem ruins around this dark absence. The reader is struck by the fact that they are never seen discussing sex, are never depicted thinking about sex or desiring other humans. One would like to suppose that this was Powers's way of gesturing toward the unspeakable in the lives of these men. But "the absence of the imagination had / Itself to be imagined," as Wallace Stevens has it. Instead, Powers never addresses this lack, and the silence comes to seem not deliberately expressive but a peculiar omission, one that marks out a weakness of Powers as a writer—an unwillingness, at times, freely to enter the consciousnesses of his characters.

After all, insofar as we are not allowed to see what these men truly desire, we do not partake of their damaged wholeness. There is an externality—brilliant, vivid, marvellously rendered—to the characters and their trials, but sometimes a corresponding lack of interiority. Very occasionally, we see priests resist sexual temptation, but the temptations are put in their way; their minds themselves are never seen to generate temptation, as happens every day in life. Father Urban, for instance, is challenged by a woman who undresses in front of him, and Powers winningly writes that he takes his eyes off her, and keeps them off: "It was like tearing up telephone directories, the hardest part was getting started." Father Urban is like Father Burner, who, hearing high heels outside, turns "firmly away from the window." There is a pathos in this determination, and the writing has force because it is so glancing. But we are



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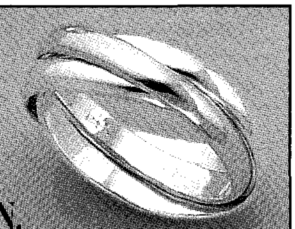

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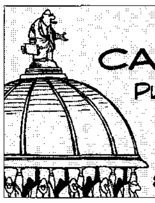

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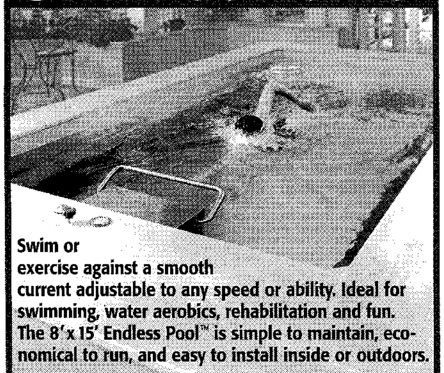

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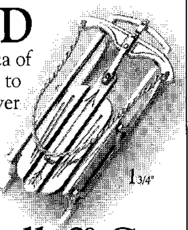

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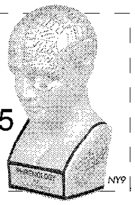


never admitted to the pain such determination causes these men. We are only at the lintels of their minds.

It might be argued that Powers rarely shows his characters enjoying spiritual lives, either, and that we are to understand *this* silence as indicative of a painful lack. Powers does write every so often of the almost forgotten attempt to pray. He writes, for instance, about the regret Father Hackett experiences when he sees that his spiritual life has been compromised, but we never read of his regret about the loss of a past sexual life. "Wheat That Springeth Green" begins by narrating the teen-age years of Joe Hackett. Powers writes of Joe's sexual adventures, tells us that the boy caught V.D., and then leaps over several years to the seminary. From this moment through the next two hundred and eighty pages, in which we see Father Hackett indulge in a range of vices, sex is never again mentioned, not even as an external temptation. It drops out of Joe's mind, and out of the novel, and the V.D. begins to seem like a rather clumsy way of effecting this silence. Of course, Father Hackett is a duller fictional character for it.

Powers's reticence about the matter of the spiritual life does become something of a problem in his two novels. The heroes of those books lack sufficient consciousness, in part because the novels are picaresque in motion, as character reveals itself in the journey of action. The relentless emphasis on worldly parish activity, or on petty vices, at the expense of any discussion of spiritual aspiration becomes a little stultifying. Especially in Powers's second novel, we feel we should not have to share, to such a degree, the barrenness of these men's lives. The problem with writing about priests as if they were business managers is that, inevitably, one is reading about business managers. Powers is often praised for depicting priests as if they were no different from other men. But this can't be a virtue, only a lesson. Implicit in this praise, I think, is the suggestion that the secularism of priests may be more interesting than the secularism of nonpriests. Actually, the secularism of priests may be somewhat less interesting than other men's secularism—first, because it is more limited, and, second, because it may be presented as interesting simply because it is the secularism of people who are not usually secular.

These problems afflict only the novels, and acutely only the second. The stories—and many short-storylike scenes in the novels—blaze, because Powers is not compelled to stretch his hero's interiority over hundreds of pages. (He resembles Eudora Welty and V. S. Pritchett in this talent for the short visit and comparative weakness in the long engagement.) Like many writers of short stories, he is a master of the portrait, of character as a bright blot of essence. Since his stories present only a quick swipe of life, we do not attempt to construct wholeness from particles, and do not feel its lack. Instead, we revel in the vitality of his people, leased only briefly to their fictional worlds.

Powers's prose is consistently superb—rare but not thinned by mandarinism, richly metaphorical but never unbudgeted in its wealth, each sentence a pondered finality. The slightest phrases bloom: "a few twigs folded in death"; a priest "caught in the old amber of his inadequacy"; the same priest, seen lying on his bed trying to get his trousers on, his "legs heaving up like howitzers." A disagreeable pastor is seen, from above, by a nun who dislikes him: "Father massaged his bald head to rouse himself. He wrinkled the mottled scalp between his hands and it seemed to make a nasty face at her."

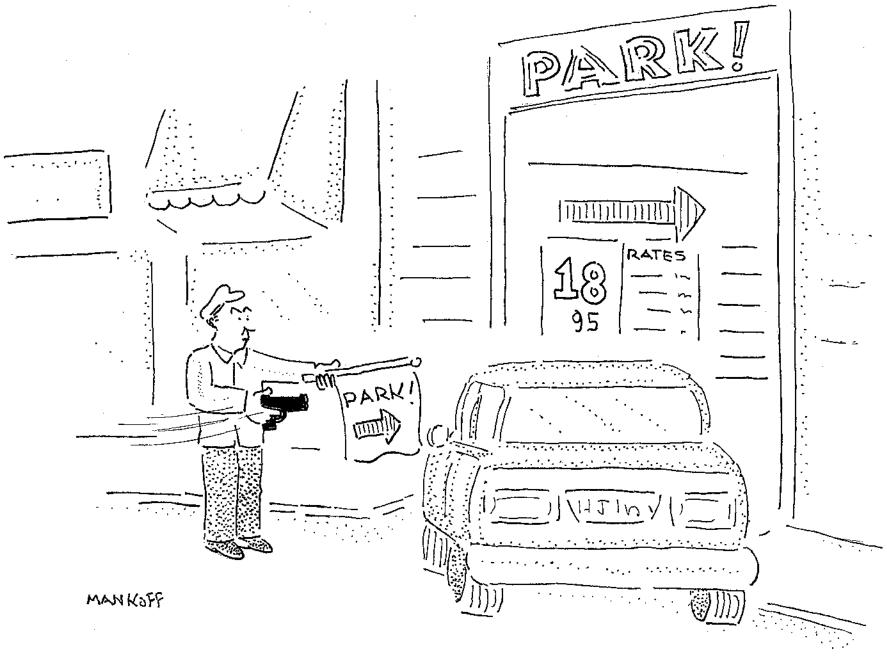
Like some, but by no means all, stylists—like Joyce, not Nabokov—Powers is a stylist of conversation; dialogue is style by other means. From Chekhov and Joyce, perhaps also from Pritchett (who praised his stories), he learned how to observe the brief non sequiturs by which people express themselves, and to see that these bursts of illogic represent riots of freedom, and thus of trapped logic, in otherwise orderly souls. In these stories, the parishioners who so bother their priests are invariably pocket egotists, humble people for whom the pastor is a mobile confessional, into which an almost punitive expansiveness can be spilled. Mrs. Klein, recently widowed, comes to see Father Eudex, in "The Forks," and, without invitation, comments, "It's a German name, Father. Klein was German descent. . . . It ain't what you think, Father. . . . Some think it's a Jew name. But they stole it from

Klein." Gradually, it becomes clear that Mrs. Klein wants to ask her priest for advice about how to invest her new inheritance. She becomes angry when Father Eudex suggests that she might give her money away: "But I got to say this—you ain't much of a priest. And Klein said if I got a problem, see the priest—huh! You ain't much of a priest!"

Powers is at his most comic when catching, as if by luck, this brackish overflow of people's souls. Father Urban is asked by a stranger where he comes from, and replies that for many years he travelled out of Chicago, at which the man bursts out, "Chicago! Don't tell me you haven't got a problem there!" In "The Valiant Woman," Mrs. Stoner, a miserable housekeeper, keeps a list of new Catholic converts. She is sitting with the pastor, after a meal. "And Henry Ford's grandson, Father. I got him down." And then she remarks, for no apparent reason, "I see where Henry Ford's making steering wheels out of soybeans, Father." (The obsequious placement of that final "Father" is wonderful.) Or—my favorite—a small man churning ice cream: " 'By Dad!' he breathed, a little god invoking himself."

Just as Powers alights gently on these small storms of egotism, so he slantingly illuminates the sad cruxes in which his priests find themselves. A lonely curate, long passed over for promotion, is encouraged to think that the bishop wants to discuss a new job with him, and imagines how he'll look when he receives the news: "reliable, casual, cool, an iceberg, only the tip of his true worth showing"; he has, of course, merely been transferred ("Prince of Darkness"). A bishop is excited about building a new cathedral until one day, visiting the site, he notices that the arches are not built with keystones. Feeling that he is himself of diminishing importance in his diocese, not enough of a keystone, he broods on this architectural lack, and his interest in the cathedral withers ("Keystone"). A pastor does not feel powerful enough to speak firmly to the housekeeper who lords it over him ("The Valiant Woman").

In these stories, there is a lovely, travelling hesitancy, an obliquity, so that they seem to creep up on the reader, not frontally but sidewise or from behind, as a ship is boarded. The strongest of them are surely among the finest written by an American. At his best, Powers shows again what comic realism can do: how it attends to the human exception, how it scathes our pretensions and blesses our weaknesses. Comedy is incurably secular, as Chaucer must have known. For despite Powers's Christian faith, and despite the severity of his disappointment with the Catholic Church, his writing, in its humane irony, tends toward an unwitting inversion of Christianity, whereby his characters are not punished but already forgiven for sins they do not repent of, and the dry ground of their souls is moistened by the author's gentle laughter. ♦



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BOOKS

GET HAPPY

An anthology that sings.

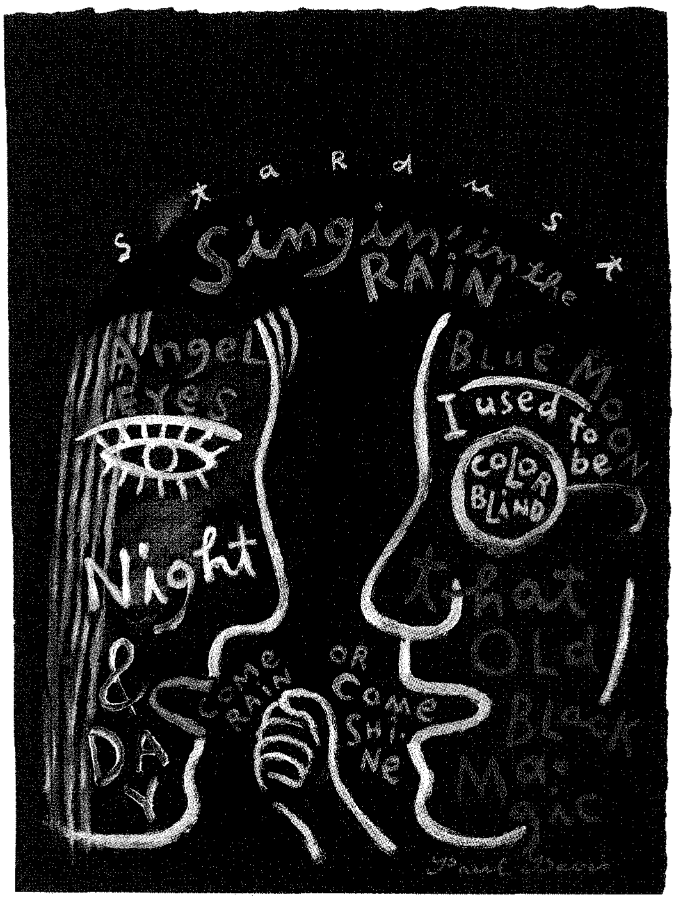
BY JOHN LAHR

When the curtain came up on the twentieth century, song was the big magic that offset the brutal force of America's new industrial momentum. The term itself is etymologically linked to the notion of enchantment, a word whose root is in the Latin verb *cantare*—"to sing." And, from the nineteen-twenties on, as new technology broadcast songs farther and deeper than ever before into the recesses of the citizen's private space, they cast a spell on the nation's romantic imagination. The urban landscape was changing; so was the inner one. No wonder, then, that Jay Gatsby, the archetypal dreamer, had a love of the "melancholy and romantic beauty" of popular song and a habit of projecting an amplitude of deep meaning onto simple lyrics. Songs "were a satisfactory hint of the unreality of reality," F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote in "Trimalchio"—an early version of "The Great Gatsby"—"a promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy's wing." Whether they filtered out from alleyways, bars, parlor sing-alongs, vaudeville, or the Broadway stage, the songs of the first half of the century were an antidote to the exhaustion that had laid low millions of city dwellers. They turned pain into pleasure, longing into optimism, and the everyday into the extraordinary; they created the satisfaction that American society promised but did not easily deliver. The redeemer nation had found a way to redeem the moment.

"The popular song of the past half-century had the largest impact on American culture of any so-called art form," the Tin Pan Alley philosopher Irving Caesar said in the mid-seventies. "Why, for God's sake, the popular song IS American culture." He was not wrong. Among Caesar's many hits was "I Want to Be Happy," a song that might as well have been Tin Pan Alley's mission statement. Songwriters were in the business of happiness. "You can manufacture joy," sang George M. Cohan, one of the original modern joy boys. With his bantam swagger, Cohan incarnated and articulated the country's impudent, freewheeling imperialism, its volte-face from the European past to the American present. As popular song shook off the sedate and literary syntax of the narrative ballad and adopted instead the streamlined, demotic verve of the New York City streets, Cohan drew the genre's new battle lines: "I want a Sousa strain / Instead of a Wagner pain," he sang in "I Want to Hear a Yankee Doodle Tune." "Give the trombones a chance to blow in it, / Give me a dash of rag and go in it. . . . / Music to please the gang / With plenty of biff and bang." As for lyrics, Cohan asserted the hegemony of Tin Pan Alley's raffish proletarian wordsmiths, who had one hand on their hearts and the other on their wallets:

> Give me the fellow
> Who writes the mellow
> Contagious strain that's rather yellow.
> It may be hashy,
> And may be trashy,
> But still it's dashy and gets the cashy.
> It's really clever
> And lasts forever,
> You hear it once, forget it never,
> For now we are coming to hanky, panky,
>   popular melody days.

Cohan is just one of a hundred and eighty modern lyricists whose contributions are collected in the new anthology "Reading Lyrics" (Pantheon; $39.50)—a delightful demonstration of how Cohan's popular-melody days turned into the Golden Age of the American song. Compiled by the music historian Robert Kimball and the former editor of this magazine Robert Gottlieb, who is responsible for the equally outstanding "Reading Jazz," the anthology lets the lyrics speak for themselves. "A song without words is just a piece of music," the composer Jule Styne once said, but it's impossible to read the lyrics to these classic songs without hearing in the mind's ear the melody to which they are set. "Words make you think thoughts. Music makes you feel a feeling. But a song makes you feel a thought," said the lyricist E. Y. Harburg, whose "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" and "Over the Rainbow" are the resonant anthems of two different American generations. With their comprehensive selection, Kimball and Gottlieb make an unwitting but convincing case that the American popular song—to borrow Cole Porter's pun from "It's De-Lovely"—is not "the Tin-Pantithesis" of poetry but a profound and defining part of the Republic's eloquence.



PAUL DAVIS

Ragtime is the sound that drove the stake through the sentimental heart of the Victorian ballad. In the spring of 1918, when the Gershwins sat down to collaborate on their first song, what they proclaimed was "The real American folk song— / A master stroke song— / IS A RAG!" The rag's syncopated beat was a call to action—a "mental jag"—that caught the country's optimistic strut and pace, the lightness of being that came with the pursuit of property and mobility. As Philip Furia points out in "The Poets of Tin Pan Alley," syncopation also "ragged" the lyrics, "reversing verbal accents, breaking up phrases, splitting words by musical pauses and rhythmic shifts"; it opened the door to the wonderful wordplay of the new generation of songwriters.

Irving Berlin, who spanned the early and the classic eras of songwriting, started the craze, in 1911, with "Alexander's Ragtime Band," which in its bouncy ebullience mischievously turned even the nineteenth-century classical "nag" Stephen Foster upside down: "And if you care to hear / 'The Swanee River' / Played in ragtime, / Come on and hear, / Come on and hear / Alexander's Ragtime Band." Jerome Kern said of Berlin that he "absorbs the vibrations emanating from the people, the manners and the life of his time and in turn gives these impressions back to the world simplified, clarified, glorified." In the ragged meter, Berlin, a Russian immigrant, heard the energy of the New World he'd adopted. "All the old rhythm is gone and in its place is heard the hum of an engine, the whir of wheels, the explosion of an exhaust," Berlin said. He, of course, was not the only great songwriter who was deconstructing the sounds of America in order to reflect them back in song. Ira Gershwin wrote in his diary:

> Heard in a day: An elevator's purr, telephone's ring, telephone's buzz, a baby's moans, a shout of delight, a screech from a "flat wheel," hoarse honks, a hoarse voice, a tinkle, a match scratch on sandpaper, a deep resounding boom of dynamiting in the impending subway, iron hooks on the gutter.

By 1914, the blues had also arrived in Tin Pan Alley and, with them, an unabashed, loosey-goosey way with words. "I loves dat man lak a schoolboy loves his pie, / Lak a Kentucky Col'nel loves his mint an' rye," W. C. Handy wrote in "St. Louis Blues" (1914). In "Some of These Days," the black lyricist and composer Shelton Brooks created what Alec Wilder called "perhaps *the* landmark song" of early Tin Pan Alley, a direct feisty shout of slangy passion: "Some of these days / You'll miss me, honey. / Some of these days, / You'll feel so lonely." And he took colloquial speech a step farther in "(That's the Way) Dixieland Started Jazz": "They're all getting so flustrated / 'Bout how jazz first originated."

In "Reading Lyrics," we watch this linguistic nonchalance work its way up the food chain, from Joseph McCarthy's artless "You Made Me Love You" ("And all the time you knew it, / I guess you always knew it") through P. G. Wodehouse's feigned shrug in "Bill" ("I love him, / Because he's—I don't know— / Because he's just my Bill") to Lorenz Hart's "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" ("Vexed again, / Perplexed again, / Thank God I can be oversexed again") and the apogee of the conversational aside, Stephen Sondheim's "The Ladies Who Lunch":

> And here's to the girls who just watch—
> Aren't they the best?
> When they get depressed, it's a bottle of
> Scotch
> Plus a little jest.
> Another chance to disapprove,
> Another brilliant zinger,
> Another reason not to move,
> Another vodka stinger—
> Aaaahh—I'll drink to that.

In the pre-Rodgers and Hammerstein musical era, when plot and charac-

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ter were notional, and in the flourishing revues of the time, song itself was the star of the show; and clever rhyme provided the drama and much of the comedy. For me, Irving Berlin's awesome pyrotechnics are the high-water mark of the genre. Berlin, who studied Alexander Pope and admired the music he made with the heroic couplet, gave the popular song a similar dashing internal rhyme in production numbers such as "Puttin' on the Ritz":

Come, let's mix where Rockefellers
Walk with sticks or umbrellas
In their mitts,
Puttin' on the Ritz.

"Reading Lyrics" displays the full range of lyrical bravura. In the romantic bickering of "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off," Ira Gershwin juggles English-American vowel sounds: "Eether, eyether, neether, nyther." In "If I Only Had the Nerve," Harburg morphs language to fit the low-comic high jinks of Bert Lahr's bravado: "But I could show my prowess, / Be a lion, not a mowess." Cole Porter defines, for the first time, pop culture's high-low comedy of manners in four deft lines that rhyme "a symphony by Strauss" with "Mickey Mouse," and "a Shakespeare sonnet" with "a Bendel bonnet." Lorenz Hart's wit provides the apex of rhyming: "When love congeals / It soon reveals / The faint aroma of performing seals." (Incidentally, in a song that isn't included in the volume, Hart also reached the nadir: "Lover, when I'm near you / And I hear you speak my name / Softly, in my ear you / Breathe a flame.")

With the revolutionary success of "Oklahoma!," in 1943, however, plot became the defining element of the musical. Song was now the servant of the play, and rhyme was forced to take a back seat. "A rhyme should be unassertive, never standing out too noticeably," Oscar Hammerstein II said. "In fact, a rhyme should appear only where it is absolutely demanded to keep the pattern of the music," he added. "If a listener is made rhyme-conscious, his interest may be distracted from the story of the song." In Hammerstein's hands, the song lyric aspired to—and often achieved—the "concise eloquence which is the very essence of poetry." Consider, for instance, his "All the Things You Are": "You are the promised kiss of springtime / That makes the lonely winter seem long."

"There's no such thing as a new melody," Berlin said. "Our work is to connect the old phrases in a new way, so that they will sound like a new tune. Do you know that the public, when it hears a new song, anticipates the next line? Well, the writers who do *not* give them something they are expecting are those who are successful." It's estimated that eighty-five per cent of the songs written in America between 1920 and 1940 were love songs, and "Reading Lyrics" illustrates how successfully the songwriters managed to wrong-foot public expectation and bear ingenious witness to the caprices of the heart. The anthology shows lyricists working every seam of love's gold mine. There's the act of falling in love, which Ted Koehler captures brilliantly in the rush of words that begin "Let's Fall in Love":

I have a feeling,
It's a feeling
I'm concealing,
I don't know why.
It's just a mental,
Incidental,
Sentimental
Alibi. . . .
Why go on stalling?
I am falling,
Love is calling,
Why be shy?

There's the wistful longing for love (Berlin: "They say that falling in love is wonderful, / It's wonderful, so they say"). There's the masochism of love (Hart: "I can't win, but here I am, / More than glad to be unhappy"). There's the fickleness of love (Harburg: "When I'm not near the girl I love, / I love the girl I'm near"). There's the act of killing the heart (Gus Kahn: "I have stocked my heart / With icy frigidaire"), and even, well, murder in love (Betty Comden and Adolph Green's "If You Hadn't—But You Did," a song that begins with a simulated gunshot). One of the most enjoyable rediscoveries in the book is Leo Robin, whose prowess is epitomized in the bittersweet "Thanks for the Memory," which dramatizes more potently than any of his better-known colleagues' songs the gallantry, intimacy, and regret in love's negotiation:

We said good-bye with a highball,
Then I got as high as a steeple.

But we were intelligent people,
No tears, no fuss,
Hurray for us.
So thanks for the memory,
And strictly *entre nous*,
Darling, how are you?
And how are all the little dreams that
never did come true?

“Reading Lyrics” is perhaps a little too heavy on romance and too light on songs of social comment. For instance, there is no Woody Guthrie, who should fit within the parameters of popular song, and rather too much P. G. Wodehouse. While Harburg’s “Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?” and “Necessity” make the cut, such marvellous Harburg social observations as “When the Idle Poor Become the Idle Rich,” from “Finian’s Rainbow,” and “Napoleon,” from “Jamaica,” do not. Harburg is one of the few Broadway songwriters to put his puckish word hoard to progressive ends, so that, as he said, “a new idea can find a soft spot under a hard hat.” In general, American popular song has always preferred to gum rather than bite the hand that feeds it. “Song is the pulse of a nation’s heart,” Harburg said. “A fever chart of its health.” But, inevitably, since the popular song’s job description is to dispel care, it often sells an ideology of acceptance.

As propaganda for a way of life, songs have the added power of being at once invisible and omnipresent; they infiltrate every space and cannot be censored; they homogenize values and consolidate the status quo. America was the laboratory that proved Plato’s contention that songs are “spells for souls for the creation of concord.” If you read between the lines of many of the lyrics in the anthology, you hear an alarmed society calming its frazzled nerves. In the face of poverty and the Depression, some lyricists offered inspirational Rxs. In “Street of Dreams,” Sam M. Lewis and Joe Young’s remedy is faithfulness: “Poor, no one is poor / Long as love is sure.” Gus Kahn’s is fun: “There’s nothing surer, / The rich get rich and the poor get laid off, / In the meantime, / In between time, / Ain’t we got fun?” And Dorothy Field’s is perseverance: “Pick yourself up, / Dust yourself off, / Start all over again.”

Occasionally, as in the clear, fierce irony of Lewis Allan’s “Strange Fruit,” a song about lynching (which is given a biography of its own in David Margolick’s “Strange Fruit”), a disenchanted note is heard:

Pastoral scene of the gallant South
The bulging eyes and twisted mouth,
Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh,
And the sudden smell of burning flesh!

But after the Second World War, when America became the richest and most powerful country in the world (the average personal income tripled between 1940 and 1955), a new sanctimoniousness sneaks in. “The most important ingredient of a good song is sincerity,” Hammerstein said. His songs, in their finesse and ambition, are an assertion of the nation’s faith in its own goodness. “A hundred million miracles / Are happening every day,” he wrote in “Flower Drum Song” (1958). “And those who say they don’t agree / Are those who do not hear or see.”

“Reading Lyrics” is both a groundbreaking social document and its own pleasure dome. Its seven hundred and six pages confirm the accomplishments of the greats, but they also provide surprises. Stephen Sondheim’s brilliant œuvre seems smaller in emotional range than that of some of his less esteemed peers. The achievements of the big-hearted, jazz-influenced Johnny Mercer seem larger. His lyrics to the Duke Ellington–Billy Strayhorn song “Satin Doll,” for instance, are as easy and miraculous and inevitable as the lush life itself: “Cigarette holder / Which wigs me, / Over her shoulder / She digs me. / Out cattin’, / That satin doll.” Lyrics like these echo down the ages; and although their literacy and rhythm put them out of current pop fashion, their truth is up to the minute. In this bewildering election year, let’s let Harold Rome prove the point and sing us out with “Doing the Reactionary,” a number from “Pins and Needles” (1937). All together now:

Don’t go left, but be polite,
Move to the right,
Doing the reactionary.
Close your eyes to where you’re bound,
And you’ll be found
Doing the reactionary. . . .
Hand up high and shake your head,
You’ll soon see red,
Doing the reactionary. ♦

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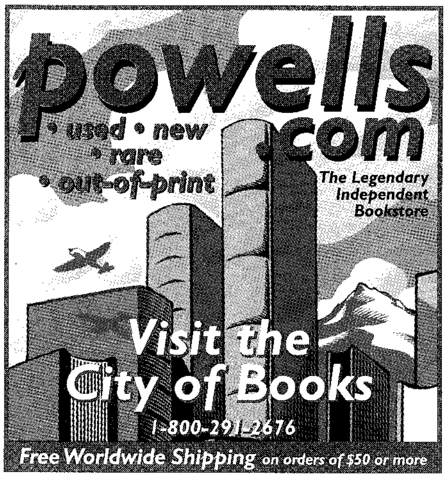

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BRIEFLY NOTED

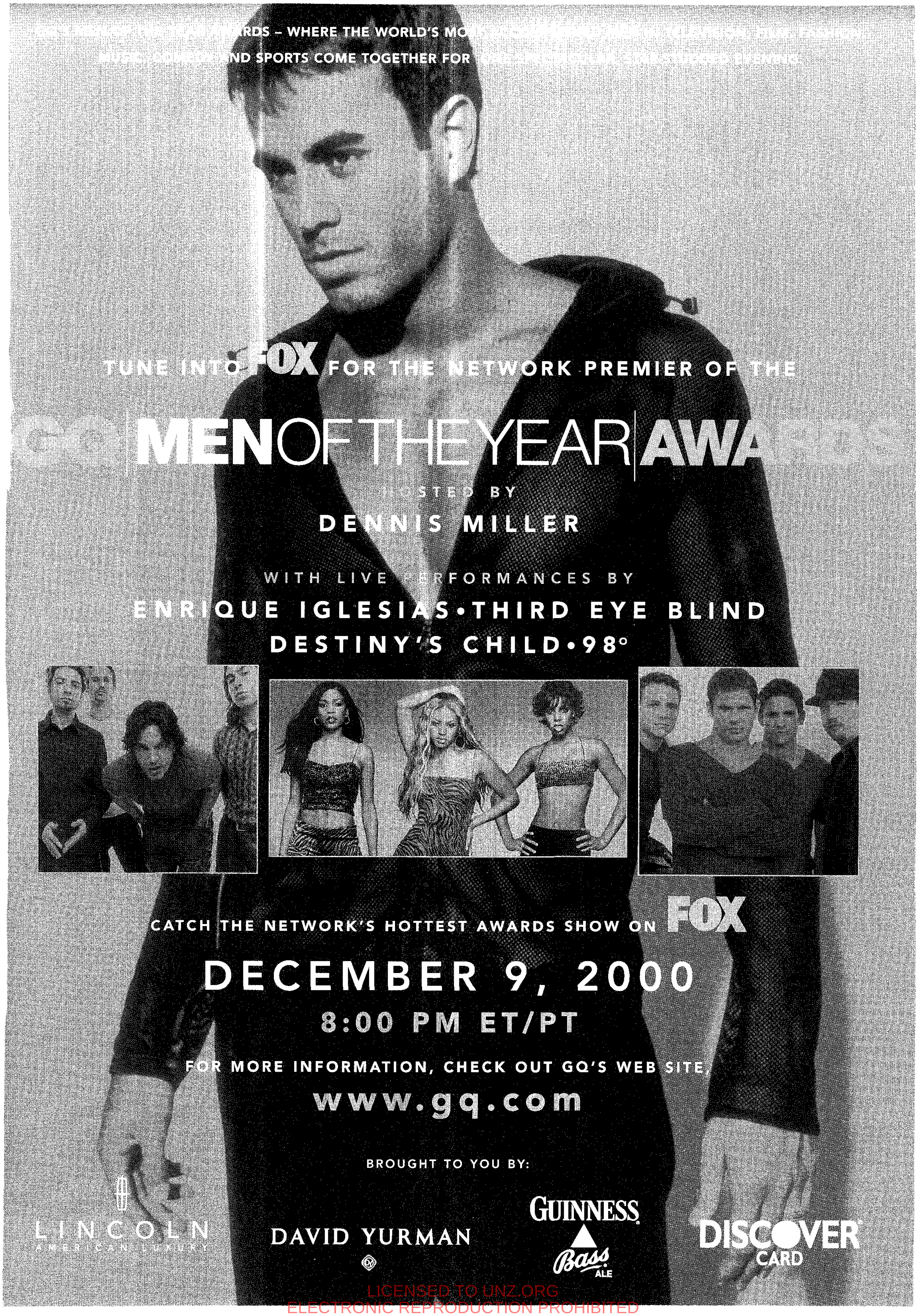
Norwegian Wood, *by Haruki Murakami (Vintage; $13).* Murakami, who is best known for a surreal, postmodern brand of fiction, here offers a realistic coming-of-age story set against the backdrop of the 1969 student movement in Japan. When Toru Watanabe moves to Tokyo to attend college, he hopes to leave behind memories of his friend Kizuki, who killed himself. But the disaffected, solitary Toru soon runs into Kizuki's old girlfriend, Naoko, and the two are drawn together by their loss. This elegiac meditation on the impossibility (and terror) of love is chilling, but Murakami's true achievement lies in the humor and vision he brings to even the most despairing moments of his story.

W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963, *by David Levering Lewis (Henry Holt; $35).* When this concluding volume of Lewis's monumental biography opens, Du Bois, aged fifty-one, has already accomplished much: he has made original contributions to scholarship as a historian and sociologist (his 1903 book "The Souls of Black Folk" defined African-American consciousness for a generation of Americans), he has helped found the N.A.A.C.P., and he edits its magazine, *The Crisis.* Yet he would remain a diligent scholar and an indefatigable activist for forty more years. Persistent racism both here and abroad had a radicalizing effect on Du Bois, who eventually broke with the N.A.A.C.P. and embraced the Communist Party. His life was driven by a hunger for justice, and his story is told here with clarity and passion.

Maestro: Greenspan's Fed and the American Boom, *by Bob Woodward (Simon & Schuster; $25).* Woodward made his reputation—with the help of Carl Bernstein and Deep Throat, his most famous anonymous source—by bringing down a powerful man. The anonymous sources are still present in his books, but the powerful have little reason to tremble; the author's aim, it seems, is to record history from their vantage point. This may be a strange career choice for such an illustrious investigative journalist, but Woodward pursues it with unrivalled access and determination; here he appears to have interviewed dozens of senior players, including White House officials, Federal Reserve governors, Cabinet members, and perhaps Greenspan himself. The result isn't a great read, but there are enough new details to keep Washington junkies interested.

Beautiful Work: A Meditation on Pain, *by Sharon Cameron (Duke; $18.95).* This spare, refreshing, exquisitely written book takes the form of an elliptical journal. The narrator's experiences of loss and death have led her to recognize that pain is an inevitable part of the human condition. But, on a Buddhist retreat, she tries to break the causal link between pain and suffering, simply through thinking about them. The narrative is suspenseful, although it has no plot in any conventional sense, and the restraint of Cameron's style highlights the urgency of the questions she raises.

Speak You Also, *by Paul Steinberg, translated from the French by Linda Coverdale, with Bill Ford (Metropolitan; $21).* A week before his deportation to Auschwitz, in 1943, the sixteen-year-old Steinberg won big at the Paris racetrack and returned home with his pockets stuffed with francs; two years later, he was on his way home again, having learned more about beating the odds than he'd ever wanted to know. Why did he survive, and at what cost? Steinberg, who died last year, is particularly haunted by the memory of having bullied a sick old Jewish inmate who refused to get out of bed. Most readers of this unflinching memoir will agree that if this was the worst thing he had on his conscience after fifteen months in the camps he was a lucky man, indeed.



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DEAD-END KIDS

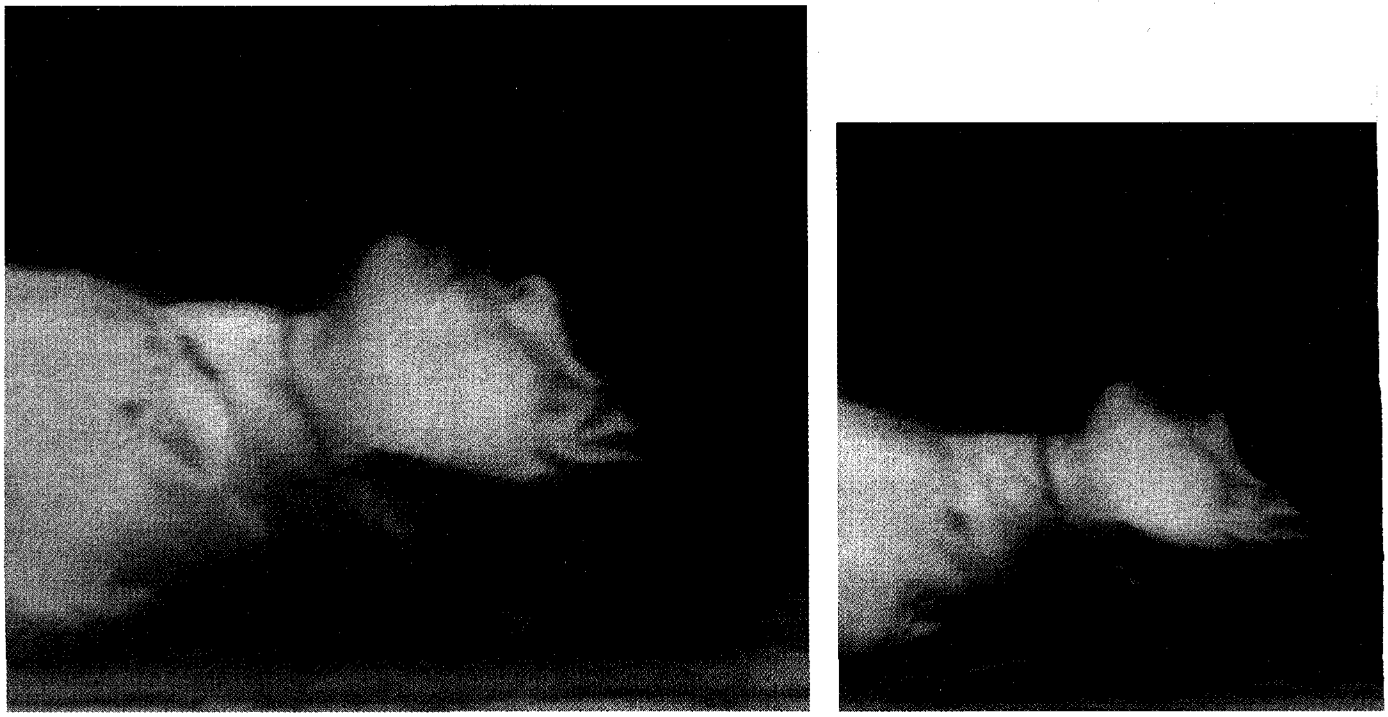
Gerhard Richter's political masterpiece.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

"October 18, 1977," a suite of fifteen sombre paintings by Gerhard Richter, belongs to a tiny category: great political art. Both the rarity and the majesty of the work shine in "Open Ends," a multiplex array of mini-shows at the Museum of Modern Art. The last of three grand decantings of the museum's collection, this exhibition addresses art since 1960; it will run until January 30th. Varieties of political art make up about a quarter of "Open Ends." The emphasis feels well timed. Today, politics is passé on the art scene, after three decades of countercultural rampancy. What was that about? What can it mean now? Because this is MOMA, which skims the cream of every tendency, the show's survey of political art—including sections entitled "Counter-Monuments and Memory" and "The Path of Resistance"—has more than a few high points. But it would be a scrappy affair without Richter's Saturnian aura at its center.

Most political art is bad art and worse politics. Art is both too sensitive and too ponderous for the rough and agile ends of civic controversy. The drive to politicize art may be honorable, saying, "This is an emergency. Let there be hard light. Away with moonbeams." Art that takes this stance proves its integrity by becoming a relic when its occasion passes. But how many artists are willing to sacrifice their ambition to a fleeting cause? Most of them strike a political posture only when it's in fashion. Beyond that, who even cares what an artist has to say about politics? Every exception seems a singular miracle. Think of David's "The Death of Marat" and Picasso's "Guernica." (The rhetoric of "Guernica" is iffy, but the spectacle of an egotist's egotist succumbing to an unselfish impulse still impresses.) Now include "October 18, 1977," which Richter painted in 1988. It is about the Baader-Meinhof "group," or "gang" (your choice of words indicates your bias), which convulsed West Germany in the nineteen-seventies.

Richter, along with Anselm Kiefer and Sigmar Polke, belongs to a great generation and a half of German painters who leapfrogged American Abstract Expressionism and Pop to the peak of late-twentieth-century achievement. (We discovered them tardily, in the early eighties; we'll never catch up.) They share an inspired metaphor: the abasement of painting by photographic mediums as a corollary of catastrophic modern history. They are temperamentally distinct. Polke is gleefully demonic, Kiefer acridly theatrical. (Both are represented in "Open Ends"—Polke by a manic painting of a concentration-camp guard tower and Kiefer by one of his ravaged landscapes.) Richter, who is sixty-eight, seems almost too intellectually refined to be an artist. His work, which is done in alternating styles of Photo-Realism and abstraction, brings moral depth and piercing beauty to painting in times that are skeptical of painting. The word "elegiac" is apt but too weak for images that feel so much like farewells. In banal black-and-white news, police, and television shots relating to the Baader-Meinhof crew, alive



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Ulrike Meinhof in the series "Dead," from "October 18, 1977": Painting that imitates photography to address a modern catastrophe.

and dead, Richter found his way to a point of crisis in both art and society. The work's social themes are political hope and human disaster, I guess. One can't speak with confidence of its meaning, which must be discerned by feel, like an object in the dark.

The Baader-Meinhof saga is long and dense. (It is told in a new book from MOMA, "Gerhard Richter: 'October 18, 1977,' " by the curator Robert Storr—whose long-awaited Richter retrospective will open at the museum in February, 2002.) Briefly, the Baader-Meinhofs were young Germans who murdered and robbed to bring down capitalism. Four of them committed suicide in jail. Richter's images include a nice-girl portrait of Ulrike Meinhof and three closeups of her head and shoulders in profile on a morgue slab. In two pictures, Andreas Baader lies sprawled, done in by a pistol that was hidden in a record player. There are paintings of the record player and a wall of books in Baader's cell. In another cell, someone is seen hanging from a barred window. This is a woman named Gudrun Ensslin, who is also seen in a sequence of three new photographs: she turns and grins at us, then turns away. The biggest painting in the series shows a funeral procession for three of the terrorists. The pictures are "grainy" or "blurry"—words that consort oddly with painting, whose effects are always intentional. Richter produced the look with feathered and dragged brushstrokes. Livid whites and light-drinking blacks, bespeaking flash photography, are attained by techniques of good old chiaroscuro.

Given that this is political art, which side is Richter on? He is a citizen on the left, like most artists. (Why are so few original artists rightists? That's easy: the right in culture swears by art of the past.) His early experiences of the Third Reich and of Communist East Germany, which he fled at the age of twenty-nine, left him an avowed hater of ideology. But he has testified to feeling a tug of sympathy with the idealism of the Baader-Meinhof people (that of Meinhof and Ensslin especially), along with horror at their deeds. This work is about conflicted conscience. It suggests to me a cogent sense for the slipperiest political slogan in recent use: "compassionate conservatism." Richter embraces events and social forces—including the ceaseless plague of media imagery—that threaten to swamp personal ethics and to negate individual vision. Thus assaulted, conscience and painting hang on, marking the hours of a siege. The effort of persistence—which rejects the relief of taking sides—is desolating. This work gives nothing. It sucks oxygen out of the air.

That's Richter's Saturnian quality: a negative energy that may be the quintessence of politics in art, which always conducts attention away from the work itself to something elsewhere. It's worth noting that a great deal of political art—from Goya to the talismanic photograph of a screaming girl at Kent State—employs images of the dead. Death becomes it. Corpses halt thought. Propagandists hope that viewers, while transfixed, will be receptive to opinions that the dead, now martyrs, are safely presumed to endorse. Richter conveys disgust with all opinion, including his own. The field of political art is a spectrum between the extremes of agitation and tragedy. Agitation is ephemeral. If it is employed in a losing cause, it becomes a historical curio; if it is on a winning team, it fades into the cultural background. Tragedy

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is obdurate. You can have all sorts of different ideas and feelings about it at different times, but they won't change anything.

The Baader-Meinhof series provides a harsh standard for the rest of the political art at MOMA. So much fancy attitudinizing! What, besides canny design, remains of the feminist agitprop of Barbara Kruger? Her photo-and-text stuff once seemed coolly sardonic; now it's screechy. But some tendentious works hold up. Among the politically fashionable installation artists of an era just ended—their unwieldy works in dusty storage and their very names drifting out to sea—Felix Gonzalez-Torres, who died of AIDS, in 1996, courts immortality with his ability to reconcile righteousness and charm. His friendly works, such as a replenishable pile of take-one anti-gun posters, appear at several points in "Open Ends." Sue Coe, the English graphic guerrilla, strangles charm. Her big painting here, which is self-descriptively titled "Woman Walks Into Bar—Is Raped by 4 Men on the Pool Table—While 20 Watch" (1983), compares well with the most lacerating works of George Grosz and Otto Dix. Go ahead and hate it. Explain why it's bad. It will still punch your face in. Leon Golub, Robert Gober, and David Hammons are other artists who are likely to outlast their topicality. Then, there is James Rosenquist's "F-111" (1964-65), an eighty-six-foot-long Pop painting that arranges images of consumerism and apocalypse on the life-size rendering of a plane that did lethal service in Vietnam. The work seems better than ever—a real classic—despite, or maybe because of, its cheap-shot rhetoric. There was an emergency brewing in the sixties, and it felt the way "F-111" looks. Like David, Picasso, and Richter, Rosenquist nailed one historical congruence of art and politics for keeps. ♦

CONSTABULARY NOTES FROM ALL OVER
From the Northampton (Mass.) Daily Hampshire Gazette.

Police responded to a disturbance complaint in the La Veracruzana restaurant at 31 Main St. at about 1 p.m. Saturday, where two men reportedly were arguing when one man's baby carriage was obstructing the movement of the other's.

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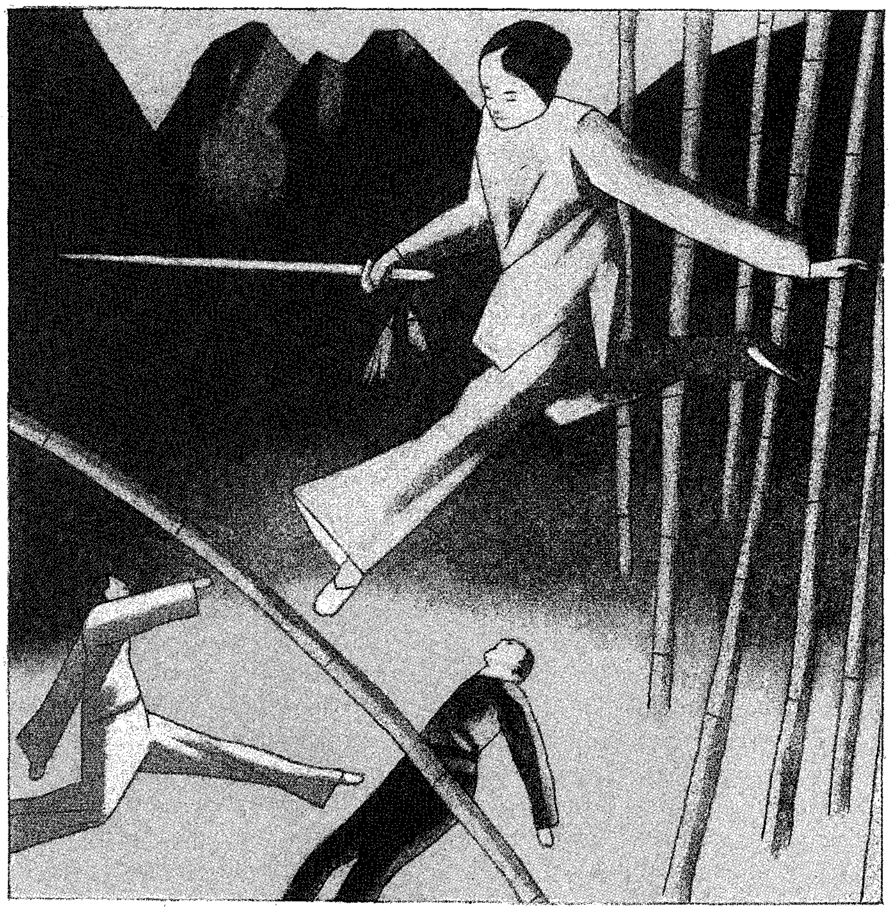
THE CURRENT CINEMA

COME FLY WITH ME

Ang Lee's "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon."

BY ANTHONY LANE

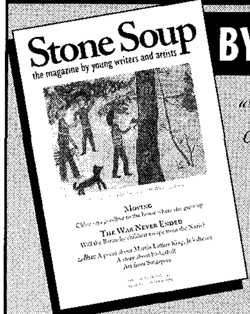


Michelle Yeoh as Yu Shu Lien coolly doing her duty as keeper of the sword.

HERVE BLONDON

The opening fifteen minutes of "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" are difficult and tense. It is safe to say that the director, Ang Lee, is starting off in crouch mode. Everybody seems to be waiting for something to happen. We are in a large house, on the fringe of a peaceful lake, in the heart of an unspecified past. There is a rustle of excitement; up goes the cry "Master Li is here!" In strides Li Mu Bai (Chow Yun Fat), bearing a sword so rare that, like Excalibur, it has a name: Green Destiny. That it sounds more like a brand of herbal tea than like a lethal weapon is not a topic to be discussed in polite company, and the present company is more polite than most. Mu Bai is lofty, pensive, and ineffable; "I was surrounded by an endless sorrow," he says of his combat training. Even his pigtail seems to be under control, although, compared with Yu Shu Lien (Michelle Yeoh), the grave warrior woman to whom he entrusts the sword, he looks like a nervous wreck.

Shu Lien heads for Beijing, which, if we are to believe Lee's wondrous panoramic shot, is laid out on a grid system, like a clay-colored New York. Green Destiny is handed over for safekeeping and promptly stolen by night. At this point, the movie takes off. I don't mean just that it quickens up or starts to grip our interest; I mean that it *takes off*, with the main characters leading a concerted revolt against the forces of gravity. There is a moonlit moment when Shu Lien runs toward the robber, whose back is against a



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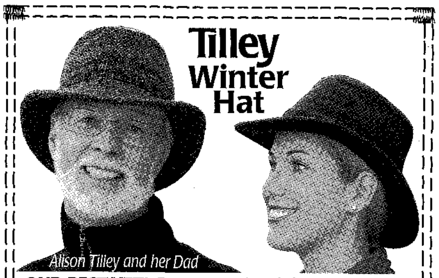
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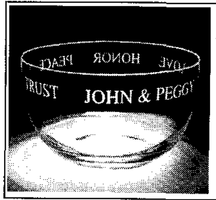

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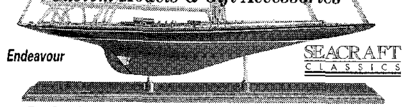

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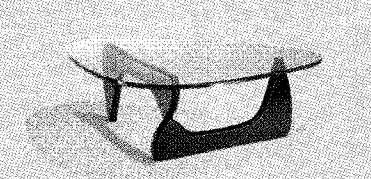

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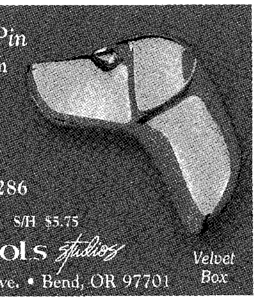

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wall, and the robber simply turns and runs *up* the wall, with no more fuss or effort than someone rounding a corner. Nothing in the movie has pointed to this sudden change of gear, and what makes it so laughably exhilarating is that we accept it as perfectly natural; to leave earthly things behind seems like the obvious, perhaps the only, next step. Lee is counting on our ceaseless, all but unspoken, need for weightlessness, for letting go; it is as true, and as foolish, as the wish to become a child.

Being Lee, of course, he meshes this desire with other, more sophisticated emotions. You leave the film on air, but you can't decide whether you feel like a five-year-old coming out of "Peter Pan" or like a Cary Grant fan coming out of "To Catch a Thief." Lee's fliers are not aloft all the time; just as they touch down fleetingly every few yards, like astronauts on speed, so the film has to ground itself regularly in the niceties of motive and plot. When Shu Lien dances across the rooftops, she is in hot pursuit, and none of the ensuing encounters are there for show; one person is always struggling to snatch the advantage from another, and it comes as no surprise to learn that the fight-and-flight choreography is by Yuen Wo Ping, the man who twirled a startled Keanu Reeves through "The Matrix." The difference is that nobody here is required to sit through the Laurence Fishburne instruction course. If you're in this movie, you've already earned your wings.

This is especially true of Jade Fox, who is not, as you might think, a porno star but a slippery master criminal. Jade, whose gender is a matter of some debate, and who for purposes of multiple homicide favors an elegant combination of sickle and Frisbee, wants to find Green Destiny and slay Mu Bai into the bargain. Then, there is Jen (Zhang Ziyi), a young noblewoman with a fiancé she doesn't care for and a governess with whom she is in league; Jen befriends Shu Lien and treats her the way a young black kid would treat Michael Jordan—as a blend of role model, escape route, and god. Add to this Shu Lien's concealed passion for Mu Bai, and Jen's reverence for a ruffian who attacked her father's wagon train in the middle of the Chinese desert (not *quite* your average teen-age crush), and you can see that Lee, who has been juggling a full set of loves and lusts ever since "The Wedding Banquet," once again has his hands full. He has described this new project as "Bruce Lee meets Jane Austen," and, unless you are literally expecting Mr. Knightley to kick Mr. Elton in the head, the judgment stands. Yet what lends trouble and depth to the movie—the hidden dragon—is not so much wit, or the sustaining of ideals, but a mysterious acknowledgment of time. We cannot guess the date of the film's setting, and even the faces are strangely unreadable, as if the years had been stretched or stilled: Zhang Ziyi looks about fifteen in her formal costume, yet her character, as we gather from a prolonged and dusty flashback, has already taken a lifetime's dose of romance. As for Michelle Yeoh, those long almondy features speak of slow suffering rather than high kicks, and her soaring motions—a one-woman rebuke to "Charlie's Angels"—are, like the whole picture, the incarnation of pace without haste.

The career of Ang Lee—and its prospects—strikes me as the most interesting in Hollywood today. There are directors who are more surprising, more vainglorious or violent, more guaranteed to provoke; but none of them seem to share his patience or his range of curiosity. If Lee's passport is stamped with entries to Regency England, for "Sense and Sensibility," to Civil War Missouri, for "Ride with the Devil," and to the East Coast of the nineteen-seventies, for "The Ice Storm," that is not because he wants to try his hand but because each new environment promises the chance of immersion. Lee works on the principle that if the physical conditions of his films punish or play on our senses with sufficient force, the rest of the period will follow. Of all the filmmakers who have delved into the seventies, he alone has not bothered with the era as a trove of retro kitsch; there is one good water-bed gag in "The Ice Storm,"

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but if you ask people what they remember of the movie they talk about Kevin Kline carrying Christina Ricci back home through the wood, with its shivering saplings and soft gray sleet. What a decade, you think: even the trees were shrunken. Contrast the extraordinary hand-to-hand, or bough-to-bough, combat in "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," where Mu Bai and Jen cling to the trunks of full-leafed trees and *sway* at each other, blades at the ready. For viewers who associate the martial arts with a scruffy, stripped-to-the-waist, bone-cracking street fight, welcome to the green and whispering variety: the pastoral-arts flick.

This movie is not just the best of its kind; it seems on the verge of creating a new kind, surpassing and deflating the old Bruce Lee jamborees with the same dashing intelligence that allowed Michael Curtiz's "The Adventures of Robin Hood," starring Errol Flynn, to outstrip the more basic bravado of Douglas Fairbanks. Curtiz, the director of "Casablanca" and "Yankee Doodle Dandy," was born Mihaly Kertesz, in Budapest, and Ang Lee can be seen as a Curtiz for our times: the uncondescending outsider, reading the runes of the New World. Hollywood needs such men—civilized craftsmen with honor and humor—more than it needs the maverick or the self-igniting genius, and just now the need is acute. China and the Pacific Rim are delivering the liveliest and least cynical filmmaking in the world, and also the most uncowed. (Heaven knows, there is plenty to cow them, and Lee's native Taiwan is on permanent alert.) Is it too fanciful to suggest that the generation of Lee, Chen Kaige, Wong Kar Wai, Zhang Yimou, and Hou Hsiao Hsien, or perhaps the generation that follows them, might ride to the rescue—or, at any rate, the resuscitation—of American movies with some of the panache that marked the great Mitteleuropa immigration of the thirties and forties, itself an escape into the entertainment industry from a world of threat? Would Ernst Lubitsch, watching "The Wedding Banquet," not have recognized the stirrings of a kindred spirit? To be fair, I should add that "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" is not strictly an American movie; it's in Chinese, with subtitles. I should also add, however, that I didn't even notice, and that I don't care. The crossover begins here. ♦

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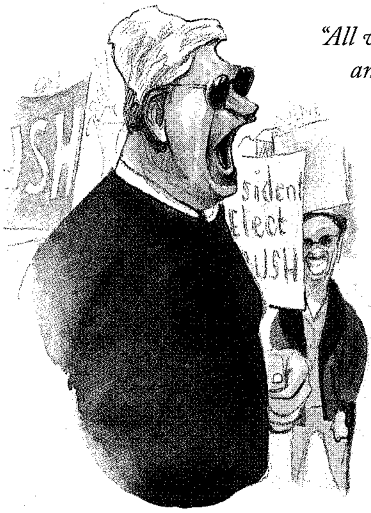
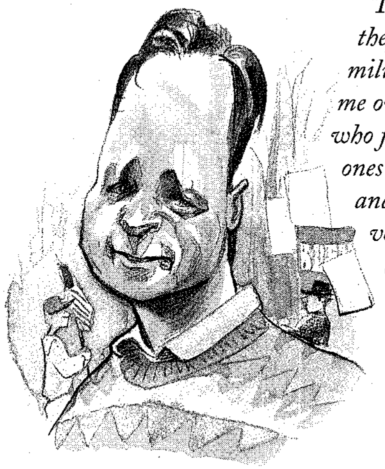
THE BACK PAGE BY STEVE BRODNER

OUTSIDE GORE'S HOUSE

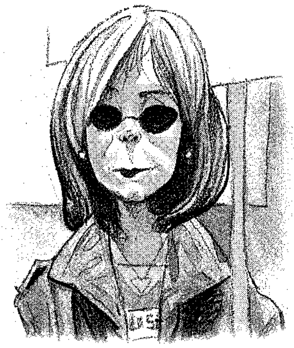
Washington, D.C., November 28, 2000



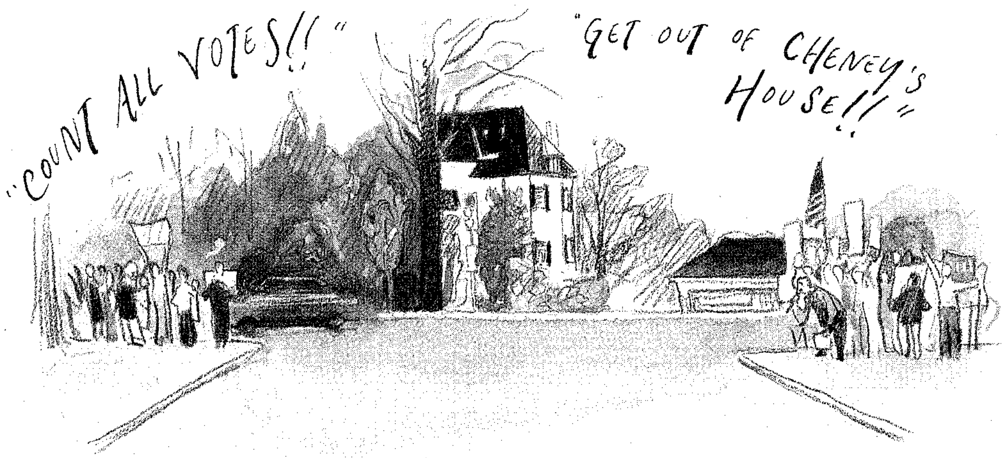
"All we've had are lawyers, liars, and litigators for eight years, and if Gore gets in we'll have it for four more years. This is our country, and we're taking it back. If we allow this to go on, the lawyers and Gore are going to steal this election. They did it in '60, and they did it in '74. But they're not doing it this time." —RAY MARTINI, *self-employed Realtor.*



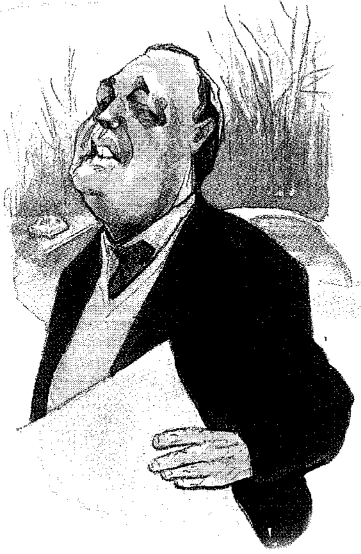
"I'm a former marine. When they threw out the absentee military ballots, that pushed me over the edge. The people who fight for our country, the ones who protect us, the men and women in uniform—these votes are taken and thrown out." —PAUL ADAMS, *preacher.*



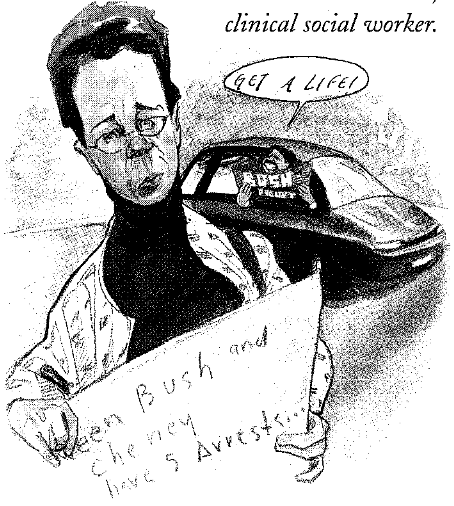
PAMELA CASEY, *homemaker (pretending to gag): "Those poor people who can't figure out how to vote. I really feel sorry for them. Duh!"*


"COUNT ALL VOTES!!"
"GET OUT OF CHENEY'S HOUSE!!"

"You know, we've got a perfectly good President and Vice-President till the twentieth of January. And we're following the Constitution. I feel like it's a real good civics lesson. For all of us." —CHARLIE JEFFRESS, *moving consultant.*



"No matter who gets in, it's going to be tainted for a lot of people. But I think the safest thing we can do right now is to evaluate and count all the votes. How can somebody take office in such a questionable way?"—DUCHY TRACHTENBERG, *clinical social worker.*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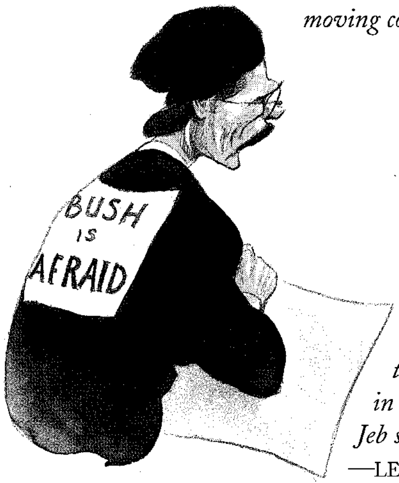
Keen Bush and Cheney have 5 Arrests...



"Bush knows that if they count every vote, they lost. It's nepotism. I can see Bush crying in the corner, 'Jeb said I could have Florida. Jeb said I could be President.'" —LES SOUCI, *Internet musician.*

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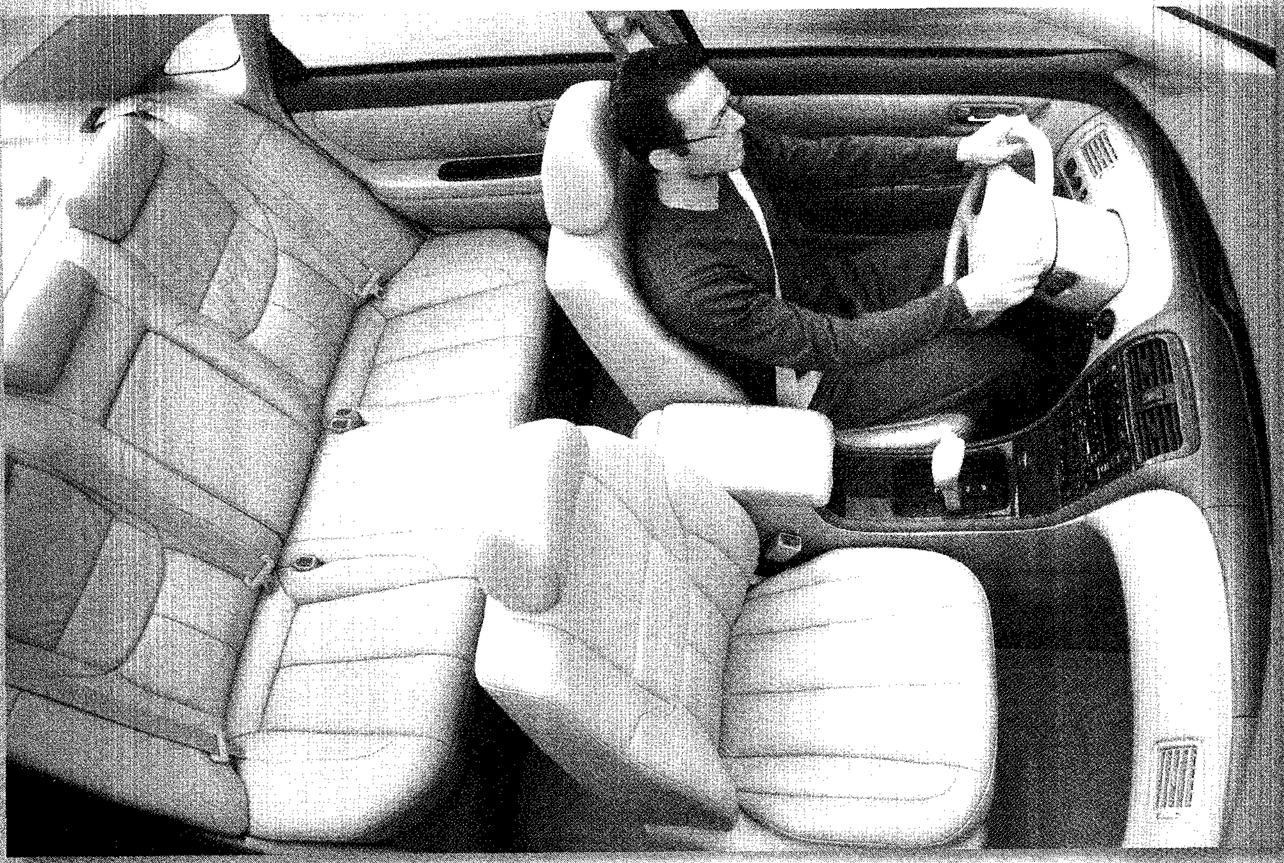

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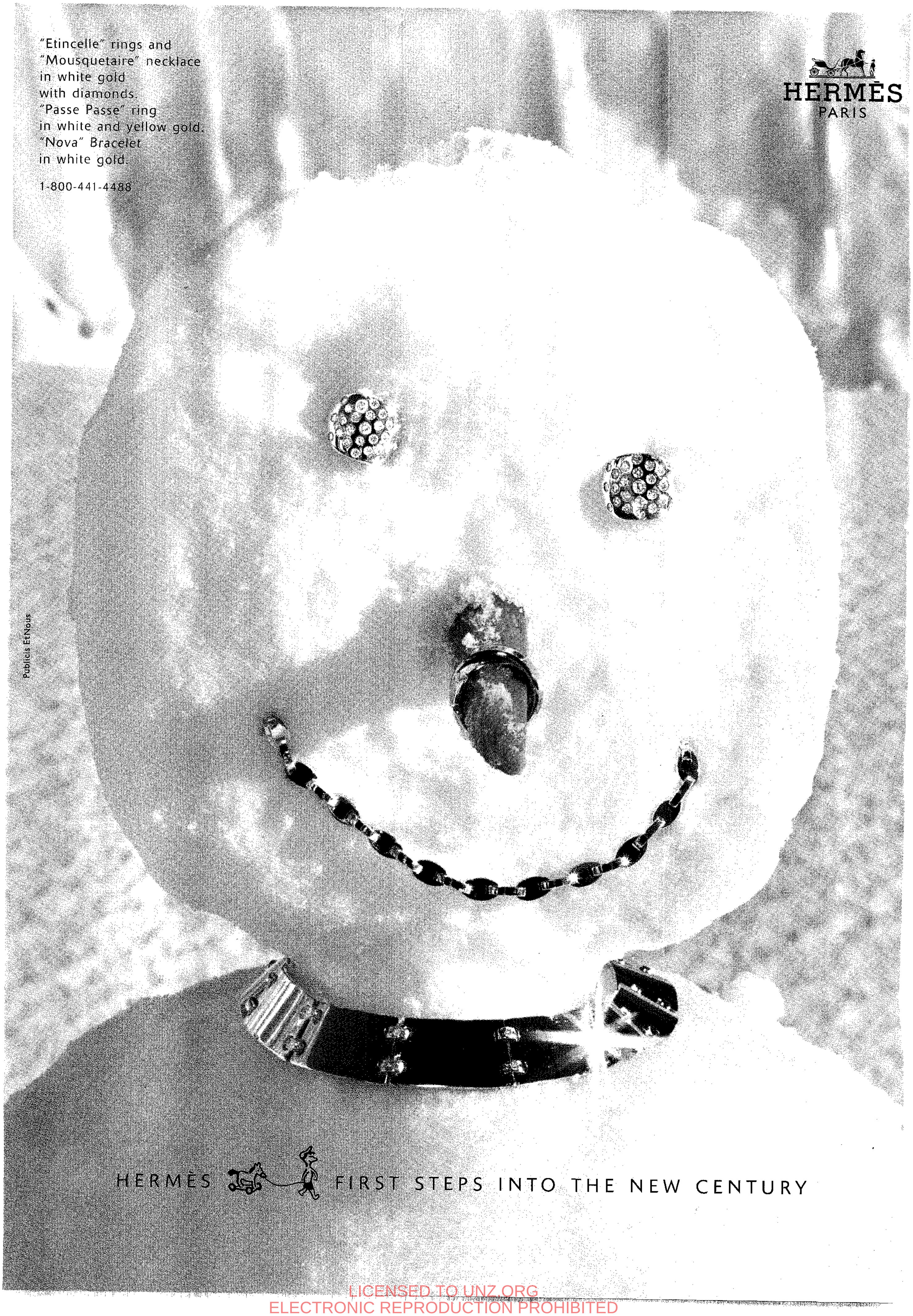

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